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HER DEAREST FOE

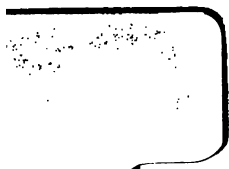


BY MRS ALEXANDER
AUTHOR OF

THE WOOING O'T



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HER DEAREST FOE.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," AND "WHICH SHALL IT BE?"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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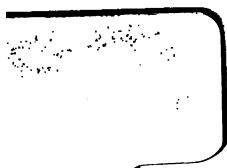
HER DEAREST FOE.

CHAPTER I.

LILLINGTON was a pretty, well-situated village, about thirty-five miles from town, twenty of which were on the busy main-line, and the rest a special little bye-way, a sort of railway lane, if such a term may be used, on which the pace seldom reached fifteen miles an hour, and the trains stopped about every ten minutes at diminutive toy-like stations, where neatly-kept gardens, rock-works, and curious devices in white stones attested the ample leisure of the stationmasters. Yet the line had an air of sleepy prosperity. It led through a richly cultivated country, tolerably



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expected, and as the name of Gregory was probably not very well known, she directed her steps to the post-office, where her inquiries were answered by a big, good-humoured, red-haired girl, who looked like the incarnation of country fare, fresh eggs, fresh butter, cream, rosy-cheeked apples, and dairy-fed pork.

"Captain Gregory," she repeated, "I seem to know the name, and yet I cannot tell where he lives. Here," calling through a door which she opened an inch or two, behind her. "Mary Jane, do you know a Captain Gregory anywhere's about?"

A shrill scream, as if from an upper chamber, replied, "I dunno' about captain, but there are some people name of Gregory living with old Mr. Thorne, at the Dene."

"Yes, sure," exclaimed the other, returning to the counter, for the post-office was also the general-shop. "I remember now old Mr. Thorne (he is the collector) has his daughter and her children from London staying with him."

"They are the people I want, no doubt," said Kate. "How shall I find the place?"

"Oh, it is quite easy; go straight through

the village, and up the hill t'other side, and at the top there's a lane on the left ; a little way down you come to a brook and stepping-stones, and the Dene cottage will be right in front."

Kate thanked her, and walked briskly on.

It was a typical autumnal day. The mists and fog that had prevailed for nearly a week had disappeared, leaving a cloudless, pale blue sky, a bright sun, and a crisp clear atmosphere, like the vigorous health of hale old age. The village, neither squalid nor yet the pampered plaything of some wealthy patron, was sufficiently untidy to be natural, sufficiently in order to be cheerful. Kate soon cleared it, and ascended the hill beyond, more slowly, enjoying the fresh pure air, the delicious odour of a newly-ploughed field, and the occasional chirping notes of the birds in the tangled hedge-rows, all dank and damp with the week's wet.

At the top the lane described was easily found, and Kate followed it through a beech-wood, where the thickly-fallen leaves gave a tinge of dull red to the ground, and the fences were moss-grown and picturesquely decayed ; the sun, now at its height, gleamed through

the thinned foliage, touching the smooth trunks with living gold, and lighting up the wealth of many-coloured vegetation with a glory artists might vainly covet. Out again into the open, where labourers were digging up the mangel-wurzel, and heaping it into a bank, to be covered with straw and clay for winter use, past other ploughed fields, with a background of tall majestic elms, and then the lane descended steeply to a rivulet, now swollen with the late rains, until the stepping-stones were almost submerged. The road rose again at the opposite side, and yet the bank had been cut away to diminish the ascent, for to the left a steeper portion remained clothed with stunted oaks and brushwood, above which rose the gables of a tolerably large thatched cottage, evidently of a higher and more pretentious description than the ordinary habitations of the village. Kate hesitated, looking at the stepping-stones, and reluctant to attempt the passage, when a lumbering lad in a smock-frock came whistling out of some cattle sheds which were on the opposite side of the road. He stopped suddenly and gazed with some surprise at the unwonted apparition of a lady so distinguished

looking as the young widow, in spite of the severe simplicity of her attire.

"Pray can you tell me if that," pointing to the cottage, "is the Dene?" asked Kate, raising her voice.

"Yes, it be!"

"Is Captain Gregory there now?"

"Yes, he be."

"Would you be so good as to give me your hand across these stones?" continued Kate, smiling.

The boy rubbed that member carefully on his frock, and advanced with a sort of wooden alacrity. Thus assisted, Kate contrived to pass over scatheless, save for wetting one boot considerably. Her cavalier directed her to a little green gate, which opened between two luxuriant bushes of lauristinas, and led by some steps into a neat garden in front of the cottage.

Here a black-eyed, curly-headed boy, of four or five years old, was teasing a solemn old house-dog, and on Kate's addressing him he immediately fled through an open door, shouting "Mother, mother!" with all the force of his lungs.

"He will not fail to bring some one here,"

thought Kate, as she looked at her watch. "Just three quarters of an hour since I left the station. I must time myself not to lose the three o'clock train." Here a neatly-dressed woman, of lady-like aspect, with fine black eyes, but a sad, anxious expression, came to the door.

"Pray do I speak to Mrs. Gregory?" asked Kate.

"You do," she replied, with some surprise.

"I have come to inquire for Captain Gregory, and, if possible, to see him."

"Pray walk in; I am not sure that he can see any one, for he is still but poorly; but perhaps I may be able to speak for him." She led the way into a small, accurately arranged sitting-room, which, being fireless and rather damp, struck a chill to her visitor. Perceiving this, Mrs. Gregory said: "If you do not mind coming into the kitchen, there is a nice fire, and no one there just now."

"Thank you, I should much prefer it."

The kitchen was a cosy, highly polished, picturesque apartment, quite a typical kitchen, and Kate gladly accepted a wooden chair near the fire.

"I ought to apologise for intruding upon

you," began Kate, "but I believe that your husband may be able to assist me in a matter of great importance. You will probably understand me at once when I tell you I am Mrs. Travers."

"Dear, dear! are you Mrs. Travers? I *am* surprised! Come all this way! I thought you were in France. I'm sure if I thought you were coming I should have had the best sitting-room fire alight." And the little woman's colour rose nervously; for Mrs. Travers, the widow of the head of what had been to the Gregory family the "mighty" house of "Travers & Co.," was a personage of high degree, far beyond any social standing Mrs. Gregory ever hoped to reach.

"No room could be pleasanter than this," said Kate gently. "And now I will tell you the object of my visit, and you shall judge if it be prudent for your husband to see me or not."

She proceeded briefly to explain that doubts had arisen from circumstances too long to be detailed as to the authenticity of the will by which she had been deprived of her husband's property, and she was anxious to ascertain when Captain Gregory would be

fit to undertake the journey to town in order to examine his father's signature.

"I am sure, Mrs. Travers, if he would see any one it would be you ; but his nerves have had a terrible shake, and his strength too. The doctor says that nothing but extreme quiet, and being away from everything like the sea and ships, will restore him. That is the reason we brought him away here. I had been with father before (he is so lonely since mother died), and my three little ones ; my eldest daughter is at school, she is training to be a governess. I lost several children between her and the next. So, as I was saying, we brought my husband down here, and he is certainly better. I suppose you heard all about the shipwreck ? I can't bear to think of it, or hear of it ; but I sometimes fear we are too quiet. He wants a little cheering up. I'll tell you what, ma'am, it's close on his dinner-time,"—here she lifted the lid of a saucepan and peeped in,—“and I'll take it in to him and tell him you are here, and see how he feels ; and maybe, you will take a little bit with us ? I have some potato-pie for the little ones and myself, for father won't be in till evening, if you would

not mind putting up with such a thing for once. You must be famished, after your journey from town," &c., &c.

And little Mrs. Gregory bustled about, quite excited by having so distinguished a guest, for whose wrongs, moreover, she felt the most indignant sympathy, especially as the unpretending grace of Kate's manner made her feel at home as well as honoured. The little boy now sidled up to the visitor—a charming, plump, rosy-cheeked rogue. Attracted by the kindly, smiling eyes of the strange lady, he condescended to get on her knee, and, soothed by the tender touch of her caressing arms, leant his curly pate against her shoulder and gazed wonderingly into her face.

"Well, I'm sure," said the mother when she returned, "Georgie has made himself at home? Get down, sir, and don't tire the lady."

"Oh, let him stay!" exclaimed the young widow; "I always feel flattered when a child seems to like me."

"Well, Captain Gregory is quite roused up at the notion of seeing you," continued his wife. "But I told him you should have

some dinner while he was taking his; and now I will go and light the parlour fire and set the table, for I let the girl out for the day as ill luck would have it."

"Then pray let us dine here," cried Kate. "It is so nice and bright and comfortable."

So it was arranged. The young widow removed her bonnet, and soon Mrs. Gregory felt at ease; for Kate possessed that indescribable tact, the product of many ingredients, but the basis of which is thorough and sincere sympathy with others, which no difference of habits or manner can put at fault, provided always a certain rectitude exists. To her all humanity was sacred, and among her fellow-creatures she found nothing common or unclean—save for absolute moral error—towards which her feelings were more akin to compassion than contempt.

Captain Gregory, and the little back parlour he occupied, had evidently been smartened up for Kate's visit, and though a square-built man of powerful frame, he looked greatly worn and reduced.

He rose to receive her respectfully, with more of the manner of her own class than his

wife possessed, looking at her intently with his keen grey eyes as he did so.

"I congratulate you on your wonderful escape," said Kate, holding out her hand; "and I am truly glad you are so much better."

"Thank you," he replied; "I am sorry you have had such a journey to seek me out. I should have willingly replied to any letter you had sent me."

"I am sure you would," she returned, sitting down opposite him. "But, Captain Gregory, I have long wished to speak to you about this unfortunate will, and now I think your opinion respecting your father's signature may be a help, as I think of making an attempt to set aside the will."

"I rejoice to hear it, madam, for, from the bottom of my soul, I believe it to be false."

"You do? I like to hear you say so. It is, of course, *my* belief, but hitherto I have found no one to agree with me. I wonder we did not think of asking you to look at the signatures before, but Mr. Reed did not really give any credence to my opinion, and it requires a hearty faith to bring forth works."

"True," returned Gregory; "I would give

a good deal to see the old man's writing, or what is supposed to be his ; but I don't think I could bear a railway journey for another fortnight or so. You see, I was knocked down with sickness before, and hadn't rightly recovered when I went to sea again. I am not a man for speechifying, Mrs. Travers, but as long as I live I'll never forget your kindness and help to my poor sister just in the nick of time. Why, she'd have gone to smash, only for you ; and me along with her, for I had nothing to spare, yet I could not let my sister and her children starve. So far as I can help you, Mrs. Travers, you may command me."

"I am indeed glad I was able to be of use to her, Captain Gregory, but my period of usefulness was very limited ; since that time I have required all my exertions for myself."

"Why," exclaimed the honest sailor with a start, and gazing with deep interest into the sweet, earnest face before him, "you don't mean to say you were ever downright hard-up ?"

"No, I have done very well ; nor would I fight for money only, though I prefer being well off, but there is more at stake upon this will."

“And didn’t that chap—he that came into the property—make no offer of a settlement? What a d——d screw! I beg your pardon.”

“Oh yes, he did; but I would not—could not tie my hands by accepting it.”

“It will be a desperate hard fight for you. This Sir—whatever his name is—has the sinews of war, and, of course, will use them without stint.”

“Don’t you think,” said Kate, thoughtfully, leaning back in her chair, “an honourable man, once convinced that he has no right to the property he enjoys, would be ready to give it up?”

“Bless your soul,” exclaimed Gregory with animation, “that is just the point! It is uncommon hard to convince the most honourable man on earth that he has not a better right to three or four thousand a year than any one else! And from all I have heard of your adversary, I fancy he is a stiff customer.”

Kate did not reply immediately; imagination had conjured up the face and form of her adversary as she had last seen him, his eyes darkened and glowing with the depth of his feelings; his ordinary cold, rugged composure fused by his ardour for herself into visible

emotion; and yet, in all this disturbance, making for his goal with a certain force and distinctness, though without an unnecessary word. It hurt her to hear him spoken of slightly. "I have always believed Sir Hugh Galbraith to be an honourable man," she said softly. "At any rate, once I embark in this warfare, I must carry it out, cost what it may!" Then, after a moment's pause, she went on. "If it is not too fatiguing, Captain Gregory, will you tell me what you remember your father said about the will he was supposed to have drawn up?"

"Well," began Gregory, looking straight away to the opposite side of the little room, "it was the end of February or beginning of March two years ago—I think it must have been March, for it was about a week before I sailed for Shanghai, and we cleared out of dock about the middle of the month. You see, father was to have dined with me at K——'s, in America Square, because I was too busy to go to him. He was to have been with me at six, and he did not come till half-past; and he said he could not help it, because he had been kept by Mr. Travers himself. Then afterwards, when he had been warmed up a bit with a glass of

grog, he says, nodding his head, how with all his conceit Ford hadn't as much of Mr. Travers's confidence as he had, for Mr. Travers had trusted him about his will, and that he (father I mean) had witnessed it not long before ; nay, I am pretty sure he said he had written it out, only I could not swear to that, and that it was a dead secret. Then he says—I remember the very words,—‘It's rather hard that, though I'm trusted, I am not promoted,’ says he ; ‘and if Mr. Travers dies I would be worse off, for Ford would be all in all with the new principal ; she, knowing nothing of business, would look to him for everything. He would be the real master, and he hates me !’ Then I said something about Mr. Travers having left everything to you, ma'am, but father pulled me up directly, and said that, ill or well treated, he was not going to betray his employer. I thought no more about it, but the impression on my mind was that you would be mistress after the old gentleman's death ; and when I came back after being so ill, I never was more astonished than to find everything upset—you gone, nobody knew where, and a new man at the head of the house. Then your friend, Mr. Reed,

came to question me, and the whole conversation came back to my mind. I did not care to answer him at first, one is so afraid of the law; but I am glad I saw him before that fellow Ford came sneaking down to my place, for I was on my guard. Father always hated him like poison; so do I."

"Why, may I ask?"

"Well, I can't tell exactly; he is too d——d polite by half, and yet he seems to make little of you all the time. What's your idea about the will, Mrs. Travers? I suppose Sir Hugh bribed Ford to forge it?"

"That is not at all my idea. Sir Hugh Galbraith would never do such a thing! Nor have I reason to suppose Mr. Ford would lend himself to such iniquity. Are you aware Mr. Ford lost five hundred pounds by the discovery of this present will?"

"No, he did not lose it all. I understood Sir Hugh made him a handsome present."

"Still there was a strong probability of his losing it, and no visible motive for him to risk so much."

"Had he any spite against you?"

"None. I have no right to suppose he had."

"Well, I cannot make it out."

"And your impression is distinctly that the property was bequeathed to me?"

"I always thought so. I think so still."

"And you say this interview with your father took place late in February or early in March. Now, the will is dated in March, so it must be the same will."

"Hold a bit!" cried Gregory. "What's the exact date of the will?"

"March the tenth."

"By George! then I'll swear I had that talk with my father a week before. I tell you, we sailed on the 8th."

"That is important," said Kate, looking earnestly at him; "but might not another will have been made in the interim?"

"Almost impossible, I should say."

"At any rate," said Kate, looking at her watch, "your evidence will be of great importance. Here is my solicitor's address. Let me know when you are able to take the journey to town. I am most anxious to have your opinion of your father's signature to the will. Meantime, have you any of his writing you could spare me, to compare with it?"

"Not at hand; but I will look some out and send to you," returned Gregory.

"Then I must leave you," said Kate, "for I fear to lose the three-o'clock train. Will you pardon the selfishness that induced me to come here and tease you with my troubles?"

She rose as she spoke, holding out an ungloved, white hand, and looking into his eyes with her own—darkly fringed, softly earnest—sending the magnetic glance straight to the sailor's honest heart.

"My dear lady"—his pale cheek colouring with the sincerity of interest—"I am but too glad to have had an opportunity of talking matters over with you, and you have done me good into the bargain. I feel moped to death lying here on my beam-ends. In ten days or so, I hope to be in town again. Meanwhile, I will look out one of my poor father's letters, and send it you."

They shook hands heartily and parted.

Mrs. Gregory attended her guest to the ford, and summoned a man from the yard behind the house to assist her over the stepping-stones. Little Georgie and his sister accompanied her part of the way down the lane, and then she went on, enjoying the unwonted

pleasure of a woodland walk, and the delicious perfume of some young larch plantations, thinking of her old home which the scenery recalled, of those happy youthful days which had so soon ended, and since which, despite her large capacity for happiness, she had never known much joy. Kindly and gratefully as she remembered her husband, she sighed to think how "cribbed, cabined, and confined" had been her early youth; and now, should she go through life without ever tasting the delight of loving and being loved? She knew herself, and murmured: "It is just possible, unless my circumstances change." Then, by some strange drifting in the mists of indistinct thought, the idea sprang almost to her lips, "How could any one imagine for a moment that a man in Hugh's position would risk the danger of felony? How impossible for the untrained and uneducated to judge probabilities fairly!"

She was in time, but no more, for the three-o'clock train, and was pushed somewhat unceremoniously by a rustic porter into a carriage rather more than half full of the same class of objectionable men with whom she had travelled down. One—an audacious, flashy-

looking personage, much better dressed than the rest—sat unpleasantly close, almost squeezing her into a corner. However, she endured it all with her accustomed philosophy, changing her place when a man left the carriage at one of the intermediate stations.

At H—— she determined to try and find a carriage with other ladies in it before taking her place.

Crossing over the bridge, which led to the “up” platform, she found the London train was signalled.

“Will you be so good as to put me in a carriage with other ladies?” said she to an official of a higher class, whose cap was inscribed “collector.”

“You must speak to the guard, ’m. Ticket, if you please.”

Kate felt for her purse. She turned her pocket inside out, but in vain. It was gone.

“My pocket has been picked! What shall I do?”

“Very awkward. You had better speak to the station-master; I daresay he will telegraph for you. You must stand back now till the up-train is gone.”

“But——” urged Kate, bewildered for a moment.

“Can’t let you pass without a ticket,” interrupted the man, misunderstanding her, and stretching out his arm as a sort of barrier.

Kate shrank back instantly, and stood quite still, striving to collect herself and think what was best to be done.



CHAPTER II.

WHEN Hugh Galbraith turned away from the dwelling where he had known the most of pleasure that had ever brightened his somewhat sombre life, nearly five months before this stage of our story, he felt strangely sore and stunned, yet not indignant. He had always accepted the position of "a fellow women did not care about" with great philosophy, returning their indifference with full measure, yet not the least resentment. But this practical proof of his own unattractiveness struck home. Worst of all, it lent the additional charm of being out of reach to the woman who had so fascinated him.

She was a lady in the fullest acceptation of the word ; delicate, refined. The attendant circumstances of keeping a shop must be repulsive to her, yet she preferred battling with the difficulties of such a life to accepting the position, the ease, the security she might enjoy as his wife. Nevertheless, he loved her the more for her unwavering honesty ; and, as he walked miserably to and fro, seeking to while away the weary hours till it was time to go to bed (for there were no more trains that day), he cursed his own precipitancy in having thus suddenly cut himself off from all chance of any more play in the game on which he had staked so much. He had not diverged from his original route with any intention of proposing to Mrs. Temple ; he only wished to satisfy his eyes with the sight of her, and gladden his heart with the sound of her voice ; and then in a moment a wave of passion carried him over the border of polite seeming into the reality of confession ! Yet, after all, he did not know what was beneath the cards. He could not for a moment believe that Kate Temple's past contained any page she need desire to obliterate or conceal, but there *was* something there she did not choose him to

know. He was too candid to attribute his rejection to this reason. He recognised her actual indifference, while he recalled with a certain degree of painful gratitude the kindly emotion in her voice as she spoke her adieux. "I suppose it will come all right," thought Galbraith, with a dreary effort at manful, reasonable resignation. "I suppose the time will come when I shall think I have had a narrow escape from a piece of folly, for it is about the last sort of marriage I ever contemplated ; but it's infernally bitter to give it up at present. Still, I suppose it is better for me in the end. Might I not have repented had she said 'Yes' instead of 'No'?" But even while he strove to argue himself into composure, the recollection of Kate's great lustrous eyes, dewy with unshed tears, her expressive mouth, the rich red lips tremulous with kindly sympathy in the pain she inflicted, came back to him so vividly that he longed with a passion more ardent, more intense than he had ever felt before, to hold her in his arms and press his lips to hers.

The Grange, as it was familiarly called—or Kirby Grange, to give the full appellation—

the old house of the Galbraiths, was even more desolate than Sir Hugh expected to find it. His boyish reminiscences presented him with a lonely picture enough, but not equal to the reality.

Yet he soon grew to be at home there. Galbraith, though essentially an aristocrat, was not in the least a fine gentleman; the plainest food, the simplest accommodation, sufficed for him. His soldier servant, a man in the stables, an old woman and her daughter to keep the house, formed an ample retinue. Some modern additions to such portions of the antiquated, mouldy furniture as could still be used made a few rooms habitable, and here Hugh Galbraith spent the summer, perhaps more agreeably than he would have done elsewhere. The land he had newly purchased gave him a good deal of employment. There were fresh leases to be granted on fresh terms; but some of his new acquisition he would keep in his own hands. Farming was exactly the employment that suited him. Moreover, Galbraith had been too long a poor gentleman, striving bravely and successfully to keep out of debt, not to have acquired a liking for money. To improve his property and add to it had be-

come his day-dream. To this end he contented himself with a small personal expenditure, although when he first felt the unwonted excitement of comparative wealth, he was tempted to many indulgences he scarcely cared for ; the first taste of life as lord of the soil awakened in him a thirst to extend his domains.

In the long summer days his greatest resource was a small schooner, in which he passed many a thoughtful hour, and which formed the canvas or groundwork on which Lady Styles embroidered her fiction of a "splendid yacht."

In short, Galbraith went wisely and systematically to work to effect his own cure ; nay, he sometimes thought he had succeeded. Perhaps for a few extra busy days the haunting, aching regret would be silenced or kept at bay ; but when he most fancied the ghost was laid, a breath of mignonette wafted from the garden, a gleam of sunset over the sea, the coo of the wood pigeon, or even a wild easterly gale dashing the storm-tossed waters with giant wrath against the dark cliffs that stood up with savage strength against them—anything, everything would touch the electric

chain of association and bring back those few weeks of strange companionship vividly before him. Again he would see Kate's eyes, the exact colour of which he never quite made out—dreamy, earnest, tender, resentful—he knew them in every change ; and the rounded outlines of the pliant figure he had so often greedily watched sinking down into attitudes of natural, graceful repose, or rising into unconscious stateliness—the restful manner, the frank, unstudied talk—all would come back to him with painful intensity.

But on the whole he gained ground. He thought, he hoped, these fever fits were growing fewer and further between. To complete his cure he seized gladly upon the opportunity offered by his friend, being so far on his way northward, when he found Upton was the guest of Lady Styles, and soon succeeded in persuading him to forsake the gaieties of Weston for the ruder hospitalities of Kirby Grange, much to her ladyship's indignation.

It was September, and the weather was glorious. Galbraith and his friend had had a long enjoyable day on the moors, which were a few miles inland from the Grange.

They had not "made bags" worthy of notice in the local papers, but they had had sufficient sport to give zest to their long tramp over the springy heather.

The wide horizon of the "fells" imparts a sense of light and liberty which no rock-bound valley, however beautiful, conveys. You are in no way shut in. The beauty and freedom of nature impress themselves upon you, and her awful power is out of sight. The far-stretching purple distance spread out in undulations like billows arrested in their swell, gives the idea of a moorland ocean, with even a greater consciousness of liberty, for it needs no imprisoning ship; you may plunge yourself on any side over a boundless space of bloom and fragrance towards the distant blue :—

"And now in front behold outspread
Those upper regions we must tread
'Mid hollows and clear heathy swells,
The cheerful silence of the fells.
Some two hours' march with serious air
Through the deep noontide heats we fare;
The red grouse springing at our sound,
Skims now and then the shining ground;
No life save his and ours intrudes
Upon these breathless solitudes!"

Neither Galbraith nor Upton were able to quote Mathew Arnold, yet both felt the influence of the scene; the breezy, healthy, life-giving atmosphere sent them back satisfied with themselves and pleased with each other.

Colonel Upton's was a much lighter and more complex nature than Galbraith's. "Enjoyment," it must be admitted, was "his end and way," and he had hitherto accomplished this end very successfully. A little more of selfishness might have made him odious; a trifle more of lightheartedness would have made him uninteresting; but, for once, no ingredient preponderated, and a pleasanter, more popular fellow than Willie Upton never existed. No one would have thought of confiding any difficult or profound undertaking to his guidance, but of the pluck and dash that would carry him over any five-barred gate of obstacle at a bound he had plenty. When we add that he was Irish on his mother's side, the un-English facet of his nature is accounted for.

The friends descended from the dogcart which had conveyed them to and from the scene of their sport, ravenously hungry, and

sufficiently tired to enjoy easy chairs, after a hearty repast, in a window of the dining-room, from whence a glimpse of the sea glittering in the moonlight could be caught. Here they smoked for a few minutes in silence; silence seldom lasted longer when Colonel Upton was present.

"I think," said he, slowly waving his cigar, and watching the curls of smoke—"I think a certain amount of roughness is necessary to perfect enjoyment."

"How?"

"Why, to-day has been almost, indeed altogether, perfect—and yet it was in the rough-and-ready style—pardon my scant civility. But if we had had an array of keepers, and gillies, and ponies, and an elaborate luncheon awaiting us at a certain point, and several crack shots, and heaven knows what besides, it would have been infinitely less enjoyable than our quiet day with that queer specimen of a gamekeeper. Our sandwiches and biscuit, with a dash of Glenlivat in that deliciously cold spring water, were a banquet for the gods! It is a great mistake to paint the lily."

"I am glad you were pleased," said Galbraith.

"Be the sport what it may, I don't care to have the game beaten to my foot," resumed Upton. "I like to do my own stalking. By the way, Galbraith, I never saw such a queer, cold fellow as you are. If I had come into a fortune as you have, after having been in a hard-up condition all the days of my life, there would have been no holding me. You used to be livelier last winter; but you are as grave, ay, worse, now as in the old times. I don't think you are a shade jollier for having 'a house and estate and three thousand a year'—or is it four?"

"I don't think I am," said Galbraith quietly. "There is so much in idea. A man can but have what he wants, and my wants are almost as easily provided with four hundred a year as four thousand. I tell you, though, what I do enjoy, Upton; I like living in this old den; I like walking over the lands I have bought back; I like planning to buy more, and watching my opportunity to do so. But I sometimes think of Indian camp-life with regret."

"I dare say you do. You are one of those fellows who are jolliest under difficulties. However, this might be made a nice place; four or

five thousand in repairs, and two or three in furniture, would make it very habitable. Then a well-bred wife with a pretty sister or two, to amuse your friends in the shooting season—and there you are.”

Galbraith smiled grimly. “If the future Lady Galbraith requires three or four thousand pounds worth of furniture, she must supply them herself,” said he.

“What an extraordinary effect money has!” cried Upton. “I suppose if you had never come into your uncle’s fortune, you would have been marrying some pretty nobody without a rap? Now you want more.”

“Well, life in our grade is very costly, once a wife is added to its encumbrances. My first desire is to collect a little more of the old estate—that will take all my spare cash, and not bring much of a return for some time to come, so the furnishing may wait.” After a pause, during which Upton hummed the “*Sieur de Framboisie*,” Galbraith resumed, “I suppose I must marry some day; but at my age a fellow may count on seven or eight years’ liberty.”

“You may if you like, but you’ll be approaching the ‘old boy’ period. However, I

daresay you will find a spouse without much difficulty at any period. You are desperately modest ; you always affect to believe yourself unacceptable. Did you ever try to make yourself agreeable to any woman ?”

“Yes,” returned Galbraith, unmoved, “and failed signally.”

Upton laughed, but gave his friend a keen glance.

“Then I am disposed to quote a scrap of verse my sister’s little girl used to sing to me — ‘Try, try, try again.’”

“In due time,” said Galbraith gravely ; “I imagine it would be rather a nuisance to have a wife very much in love with you ; but I shall probably by-and-by find a woman of good family, with a sense of honour and some intelligence, who will have no objection to add her fortune to mine, and share both with me, and we shall jog along very comfortably.”

“Good God ! what an appalling picture !” cried Upton, throwing away the end of his cigar, and pouring out a glass of claret, “Have you no warm blood in your veins, Galbraith ? There is nothing half so delightful as being in love, except being fallen in love with. I intend my wife to be tremendously

in love with me ; and will do my best to keep her in that frame of mind, thinking all my sayings marvels of wit or wisdom, and my doings heroic action, and——”

“I wish you success,” interrupted Galbraith drily. “If I ventured to form any special wish on such a subject, I should wish for a companionable wife.”

“Companionable,” returned Upton doubtfully ; “I am afraid that’s a little like wanting the moon. I have met heaps of charming, amusing, tormenting, delightful, good, bad, and indifferent women, but the companionable ones are few and far between ; and when found are a long way at the far side of a certain age. Then, if a wife is companionable, she will find it hard to preserve the little illusions respecting her husband’s genius and capabilities, which make it so pleasant for both. She will be too much as one of us, knowing the difference between good and evil. After all, those old Greeks were very sensible fellows—the simple, unenlightened, respectable wife for the home—the dashing, accomplished, pleasure seeking and giving Hetaira for holiday life.”

“I should like a mixture of the two.”

“You are unconscionable ; they can’t unite ; the mistake we moderns make is the attempt to smother the inevitable compensations of existence behind transparent bogie-covered screens of propriety. The Hetairae would not be such bad creatures if they only had property. It makes an enormous difference in any morality whether you have to dip into another’s pocket for your necessities and luxuries, or have the wherewithal to pay for them in your own.”

“Whether the Hetairae had property of their own or not, I imagine they would do their best to clutch that of their admirers.”

“Well, that is an open question. I am thinking of companionable women. To be companionable, a woman must have a certain amount of liberty both of thought and action, which, owing to our insular prejudices, we would rather not see our wives possess. There is something of the sort abroad, but I shall not vote for importing it ; but I ask you, Galbraith, is there any creature on earth so uncompanionable as a well-bred, well-educated *good* Englishwoman, a creature you would trust your life to, who would quietly go through fire and water for any one she loved,

or even believed she ought to love. But she has no more conception of the world as *we* know it, than one of her own babies (I put young girls out of the category). The realities of life must not be mentioned before her; the sources of some of a man's most trying difficulties, even if she really knows them, she must assume to be ignorant of. If one differs on religious points with the tutelar priest whose ministry she attends, she either tries to convince you by the funniest little sentimentalities, or tells you she will pray for you, or does it without telling, if she is very much in earnest. By the way, it's a capital means of keeping yourself in her mind's eye to be horribly irreligious if you want to make an impression. Then politics. What are her views? A sort of rose-coloured conservatism mixed with faith and good works, and a deep regret that you should be so hard-hearted as to vote for the reduction of expenditure when poor men want employment and salaries so much. There is a philosophic summary for you."

"I do not know about the philosophy," said Galbraith; "but I know I hate blue women."

"So do I; but then, my dear fellow, I want to convince you of your folly in expecting contradictory perfections in the same individual. Heaven preserve us from the logical well-instructed female who understands everything a deuced deal better than our noble selves. Nineteenth-century Englishwoman! with all thy faults I love thee still! But talking of politics——"

"You were talking of women," interrupted Galbraith, in a sort of growl.

"Well, I think I have exhausted the subject. So, to talk of politics. I heard you were going into Parliament?"

"I thought of doing so, and an absurd paragraph got into the papers, thanks to my sister, Lady Lorrimer, I fancy—there's a female politician for you, Upton—but when I came down here, and went about among the people, I saw I had no chance till these shrewd, cool-headed north-countrymen knew me better. I would not care to represent any other constituency. Besides, Upton, I am such an ignoramus in politics. I want to feel my way a little before I commit myself to be moved hither or thither by the minister I follow."

"Oh, if you wish to reduce your importance to a vanishing point go in for independence."

"Meantime, I am quite content as I am, if I am only left alone. Thank God, I have no near neighbours; but since the people began to come down to the country I have had four or five invitations. I have refused them, but I shall be considered a sulky, ungracious fellow."

"Of course; and your chances of picking up that companionable woman you are on the look-out for considerably diminished."

Galbraith nodded with a kindly, smiling look in his eyes, as though his friend's chaff was acceptable because of the "chaffer."

"I tell you what, Galbraith: you had better leave them all behind—I mean the hospitable families—and come with me. I am engaged to pay a visit in H——shire about the seventh. Capital house, first-rate pheasant-shooting; man of the house my grand-uncle. Besides, I want your opinion of a young lady I have partly promised to marry."

"Promised to marry! Promised who?"

"Well, not the young lady, but my sister; you see, the girl is grand-daughter to my

grand-uncle—do you see the relationship?—and but for the laws of entail she would be a great heiress; as it is, I step in and—rob her, I believe she thinks. Now, my sister is of opinion that the best reparation I could make would be to marry her. I shall see about it. Won't you come, old fellow, and support me? We'll not stay too long; and as my leave is nearly over you might come on and have a peep at Ireland. It is the queerest country. We are down at Cahir, a most barbarous locale; but the change will do you good, for in spite of the content you profess, I can't help fancying you are somehow down on your luck."

After some difficulties and demurs on Galbraith's part, this was agreed. Indeed Hugh felt loath to part with his pleasant, cheery comrade; and sundry schemes of sport and yachting were planned to occupy the ten days that intervened before the date on which Colonel Upton was due in H——shire.

"I suppose," he said, as they were about to separate for the night—"I suppose your arm is all right, quite strong again?"

"Yes, I suppose it is. I don't remember it now."

"You were lucky in your secretary. I used to laugh at the frequent, neatly-written notes I used to receive. I take long odds the writer was not old?"

"No," in a candid tone, "she was not old."

"Nor ugly either? That good-natured, idle gossip, Lady Styles, told me a wonderful story about a lovely widow at the Berlin shop. Indeed, she took me there one day to see her, but of course she was not visible. Now, had I been in your place, I should have had 'a good time,' as the Americans say."

"I do not think you would," returned Galbraith coldly. "My landlady was a very respectable person—I imagine a decayed gentlewoman."

"That sounds elderly, at any rate. Are you sure she was not a companionable woman? Ah, Galbraith, it is enough to shorten one's life even to associate with a fellow so desperately in earnest as you are. However, you must come with me. Now I remember, there is an elderly young lady at Storham, aunt, I think, to my fair one. She is very enlightened and strong-minded, wears spectacles and a crop. She is sure to be a 'companionable' woman."

ionable woman,' the exact article you require."

Thus it happened that Hugh Galbraith became the guest of Philip Upton of Storham Hall, Master of the Foxhounds, and owner of a grand country seat, which he had always kept up in a corresponding style. Having been blessed with a son, whose tastes were as expensive as his own, and who died a few years previously, he had not been able to save much for his grand-daughter. Her younger child's portion, though unusually good, he considered a miserable provision. He was therefore anxious that a marriage should be arranged between his grandchild and the heir-apparent. Upton and his friend were consequently favoured guests. It was a very pleasant house. The absence of a stately, elderly dame from the presidency made life less conventional, and the spectacled aunt proved to be a very lively personage, harmlessly and amusingly eccentric. Galbraith had not for long found time pass so agreeably. Upton's cousin was a graceful if not pretty girl, rather sentimental and romantic, with whom he did not appear to make such rapid progress as he perhaps anticipated;

but there were other ladies who came to and fro of better, or at any rate, more appreciative taste, and on the whole the fortnight at Storrham was a success.

However, time and the Horse Guards are inexorable. Upton had business in London, and Galbraith, though cordially invited to continue his visit, did not care to remain after his friend. The weather, too, had changed, and they had not been able to have quite so much shooting. Moreover, Galbraith felt ready for movement of any kind, quite satisfied that a radical cure had been effected, and that he should no longer be tormented with the memories and longings he had at one time vainly striven to resist.

In good spirits and placid mood, therefore, he started with his friend for the H—— Junction, where they arrived in sufficient time to allow Upton's servant to see to their luggage before the London train came in.

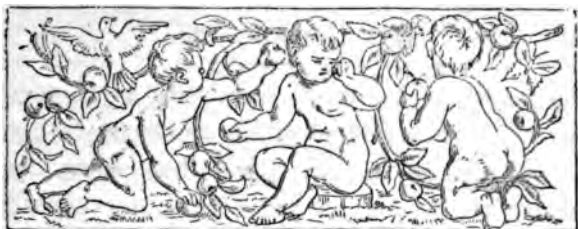
They were standing together watching its approach, when Galbraith's eye was caught by a figure in black that passed close to him. A tall lady, with a waterproof over her arm; a round cape-like cloak of black merino and lace showed the fall of very graceful shoulders;

a pretty, quiet bonnet of some thin black gauzy material, white roses and black leaves, a rather thick, black-lace veil—commonplace details—but the turn of the neck, the carriage, the quiet, even gliding step, were familiar to him ; he felt, with a thrill of delight, that it could be no other than his ex-landlady. He watched—he caught a glimpse of her face—he was right ! He saw her hasty search in her pocket ; he saw the ticket-collector put her back, but he made no motion, no sign, until the train was alongside, and Upton fairly seated in the carriage. He then said, “I shall follow you by the next train, and join you some time this evening.”

“Why, what has happened ? What the deuce is the matter ?” cried Upton, in great surprise.

“Nothing has happened. I shall probably tell you my reasons when we meet,” returned Galbraith smiling, and stepping back as he heard the whistle. Upton rose, and looked searchingly up and down the platform ; but Mrs. Temple was partly behind a pillar, and several people, male and female, were standing about. The moment the carriage containing his chum had passed out of sight, Galbraith,

his heart beating fast, walked up to where Kate stood, striving to think, and feeling unspeakably adrift. Raising his hat he said very quietly, "You seem to be in some difficulty, Mrs. Temple. Can I be of any use to you?"



CHAPTER III.



KATE thought she had indeed reached the acme of her misfortunes when Sir Hugh Galbraith's well-remembered voice met her ear. She had been dimly planning to return to Lillington to ask a trifling loan from Captain Gregory, if the station-master would have trusted her to the extent of the fare to that place ; this would have made her return to London either painfully late or impossible. In London, Tom Reed being away, there was no one to whom she could apply—except indeed Mr. Wreford, whom she scarcely knew—and now the situation was brought to a climax by the appearance of Galbraith, the one person in the world

who must not know of her visit to Captain Gregory. She felt absurdly nervous, and an uncomfortable tremor made her voice less steady than usual, as she raised her eyes to his and replied,

“Why, yes. I am in a ridiculous though awkward difficulty. I have lost my purse—or, rather, my pocket has been picked.” The colour mounted to her cheek as she spoke, and she was conscious of a curious contradictory sense of comfort, as well as confusion, in having her friendly enemy at hand in such an emergency.

“Lost your purse,” repeated Galbraith, “very awkward indeed. Are you travelling alone, may I ask?”

“I am.”

“Then I am glad I met you, for I can see you to your destination and save you any further trouble.”

“You are very good, but,” colouring more deeply than before, and speaking with dangerous discomposure, unlike her usual manner, “I do not wish to give you any trouble or interfere with your journey—or ———”

“But if you know no one here, what can

you do?" interrupted Galbraith. "Come, Mrs. Temple, let bygones be bygones! Because I was a presumptuous blockhead once, are you going to forbid my being friendly, or of use to you now you have brought me to my senses?" This spoken in his pleasantest tone and with a frank smile, was a marvelously clever stroke for a big school-boy like Galbraith to make. It put Mrs. Temple at ease; it assured her delicately that he no longer pretended to be a lover; and, more than all, it bound her to accept his friendliness, or risk appearing to recur coquettishly to his former character. She took him gladly at his word. If he was going to be simply a friend many difficulties would disappear.

"Thank you very much," she replied frankly, as he himself had spoken. "I shall be very glad of your help, for I am alone in London as well as here, obliged to stay for a few days on business."

"Indeed!" said Galbraith, resisting his inclination to look into her eyes whenever they were raised to his. "Where is Mr.—Mr.—Tom?"

"Mr. Tom," replied Kate, smiling archly,

"is ever so far away—quite unavailable at present."

"That is very unfortunate ; and what are you going to do about your purse ? I hope you had not much in it ?"

"A great deal too much to lose : a five-pound note and eight or nine shillings."

"Have you the number of the note ?"

"No, I am sorry to say ; I generally take the numbers of notes, but of *course* did not on this occasion."

"That is unlucky ; however, we must see what is to be done. Porter, here ! when is the next train to town ?"

"Three forty, sir ; and it's sometimes behind a bit."

"Half an hour to wait ! Come, Mrs. Temple, you had better sit down in the waiting-room while I speak to some of the people. Don't go into the ladies' waiting-room, it is a cheerless den, the fire has gone out." So saying, and relieving her of her waterproof with a sort of friendly authority that amused Kate—so much had they seemed to have changed places now that she was adrift and he knew his ground—Galbraith led the way into the waiting-room, established his precious charge

near the fire, and went in search of the station-master.

The time that intervened before the London train was due was amply occupied by interviews with the station-master, the inspector, and others. Kate gave a detailed description of her purse, its contents, and also of her neighbour on the journey from Lillington, and added that a reward would be given if the contents should be restored.

"Will you allow me to look after this affair for you?" asked Galbraith. "You can hardly manage it yourself in the absence of Mr. Tom."

"Oh, thank you. I suppose there is nothing for either of us to do, once the thing is put into the hands of the police, and I have given them my address. You are probably not going to stop in town?"

"Yes, I am—for some little time." He was silent, pulling his moustaches thoughtfully for a minute, and then walked away after the retreating officials.

When he returned he had the tickets for their journey in his hand.

"They are not without hopes of finding the thief," he said cheerfully. "The inspector

telegraphed at once to the police at King's Cross ; and I thought it better to give my address in addition to yours. I am afraid these fellows will be sharper if they think a man is on the track."

"I have a better opinion of them," she returned ; "I am sure they would work as well for a woman. I am almost sorry you gave your address."

"What !" exclaimed Galbraith ; "you are not going to put me in punishment again ?" a remark that somewhat silenced Kate. "But the train is alongside ; we had better take our places," and he offered her his arm.

In spite of her difficulties present and prospective—in spite of the sort of resentment it excited in her to find herself obliged to follow Galbraith's lead—Kate could hardly refrain from laughing at the absurdity of her position. Here was the man to ruin whom she had undertaken that journey, assisting her with, at any rate, brotherly care—absolutely conducting her in the most conjugal fashion to the carriage ! The care bestowed upon her, the sudden smoothing of difficulties, reminded her of her rare journeys during her married life—and she confessed to herself that it was very pleasant.

The train was full, yet no fellow-passengers intruded upon their solitude ; and, as Galbraith did not talk much, Kate, relieved in spite of her embarrassment, had ample time to think and form some towering air castles.

Galbraith's friendliness, and freedom from everything like a lover's tone, gave her great pleasure. He had probably found some charming girl infinitely more suited to be his wife than herself, and then a little sigh swelled her heart as she thought of her own nearly six-and-twenty years, and that the first freshness of youth—more from circumstances than from time—had left her for ever ! If she could establish a frank friendship with Hugh, there would be no difficulty in arranging matters amicably and justly when the time came for her to assert her rights ; whereas, if they were hampered with the complications of a false position, things might go wrong indeed. Then she thought in a somewhat melancholy mood of the loss of her five pounds—it would make her week in London very costly. What would Fanny say to her day's adventure ! How she wished she had that dear, impulsive, bright, little goose to welcome her back when she reached her des-

tion. Thus chewing the cud of sweet and bitter reflection, she leaned back with something of langour in her attitude, gazing dreamily through the window at the landscape as it flew past them.

Meantime Galbraith experienced an extraordinary sense of elation and delight. When he first recognised Mrs. Temple he acted almost without thought, on a prompt instinctive impulse, to get rid of Upton anyhow. He proposed no plan, no object to himself. At the sight of the woman whose domination he fancied he had thrown off, every idea, every consideration was merged in the imperative necessity of speaking to her, and hearing her speak once more. In the same mood, taking no heed for the morrow, and further blinded and fascinated by her ready acceptance of his professed change of tone, he plunged recklessly into the golden ocean of delight which their unexpected meeting offered.

It was so delicious, too, to have her even for an hour or two all to himself—in his hands, dependent on him. Whatever came of it he was fiercely determined to enjoy the present moment.

At this point of his reflections he leant for-

ward with alarming tenderness in his eyes. "You are tired—you look tired," he said.

"Yes, a little," returned Kate, rousing herself; "I have walked a good deal. I went to see an invalid friend, and the house is some distance from the station."

"And how is Miss Lee, and Mills, and Pierstoffe generally?"

Kate replied, and they continued to speak of it, its scenery and characteristics, till Kate, half fearing the associations it might recall, mentioned Lady Styles and her report of the "splendid yacht," which made a useful diversion. Then their talk drifted to Kirby Grange and Galbraith's belongings in the North.

This was a subject of much interest to his companion, and she tried to draw him out, not unsuccessfully. It made her heart ache to see how deeply he was attached to the old place—how his imagination was occupied by the idea of re-creating the Galbraiths of Kirby Grange in their original status. So, conversing with intervals of (to Galbraith) delicious silence, they reached King's Cross. Here, with the same promptitude he had shown since their startling *rencontre*, Hugh secured a cab, handed Kate in, directed the

driver to the address he had heard her give to the inspector, and took his place beside her, remarking, "You said you would allow me to see you to your destination."

The noise of the streets and of their conveyance did not permit much talk, and Kate thought the journey never would end. What was she to do with him when she reached her lodgings? He would surely have the tact and propriety to go away without obliging her to dismiss him? The friendly footing he had established was very nice and sensible, but the friendship was safer at a distance. Kate in her inner heart distrusted it; that he should so far trouble himself on her account was natural, as she really needed his help: the intercourse, however, must stop here. "But I shall manage it," was her concluding and consolatory reflection. "I have a great deal more *savoir faire* than he has."

Adelaide Terrace was reached at last. Mrs. Temple could not be so ungracious as to turn upon the threshold and forbid Galbraith's entrance, so he followed her into the little front parlour, from which she had removed the crochet snares, and rendered more habitable-looking even by one day's sojourn. Mrs.

Temple did not sit down, so Galbraith remained standing, looking altogether too tall and lordly for so small an apartment.

It was now dark ; the polite landlady lit the gas, and left the room. Galbraith made a sort of effort to speak, stopped short, looked down, and seemed suddenly to have lost the prompt self-possession he had hitherto displayed ; then, meeting Mrs. Temple's eyes, which expressed extreme uneasiness, he laughed, and exclaimed bluntly, " You must have some money till you hear from your friends."

" Oh, no—no, thank you !" cried Kate, stepping back in the energy of her refusal. " I could not, Sir Hugh ! I mean, you have assisted me quite enough ! If you will be so good as to let me know where to write, I will send what you have already——"

" I shall be highly offended if you do anything of the kind," he interrupted ; " besides, I must come and tell you if I get any tidings of your purse : in the meantime you can't get on without money."

" And how do you know I move about with no larger capital than five pounds ?" said Mrs. Temple, smiling.

"That's another thing," said Galbraith, looking keenly at her. "Have you any money?" he added, with his natural directness.

"No," she returned, laughing at his point-blank question; "still I do not need any from you, I assure you. I have my cheque-book with me, and my solicitor will cash a cheque for me to-morrow."

"Oh, very well," said Sir Hugh, a little disappointed, and he let his purse, which he had half drawn out, fall back into his pocket. "But I am sorry to hear you have a solicitor. Steer clear of those gentry if you can."

"Unfortunately, I cannot recover what is due to me without them," replied Kate, somewhat evasively.

"Take care that your dues are not swallowed up in the cost of recovering them," said Galbraith. He paused a moment: "I am keeping you standing"—another pause; but no invitation to sit down came—"so I will wish you good-morning."

"Good-bye, and thank you very much," returned Mrs. Temple, holding out her hand. It was the first time he had touched it that day, and it was given with a sweet, frank

smile of recognition for his services; yet Galbraith did not hold it a second too long, nor too warmly.

"I hope you are not overtired," he said, "and that I shall soon bring you tidings of your lost property." He bowed, retired, and the next minute Kate heard the cab drive away.

She sat down at once upon the stiff little sofa, and heaved a sigh of relief; then, starting up, she hastily set out her writing materials, and wrote a hasty note to Fanny, enclosing a cheque, and requesting her to forward a post-office order by return. "Quarter to six," she exclaimed, looking at her watch. She rang, and asked her way to the nearest post-office, where an additional stamp insured the conveyance of her letter.

"That is the best plan," she thought, as she walked back more leisurely. "I did not like the idea of going to Mr. Wreford; besides it would have betrayed my whereabouts, though I suppose I must tell Mr. Wall when I see him."

Tea was ready when Kate returned, and though puzzled and somewhat annoyed by this unexpected renewal of her acquaintance

with Hugh Galbraith, she was infinitely less depressed than on the previous evening. Why, she would have been puzzled to explain; but she felt as if things would not end badly could she and Hugh come to a friendly understanding, but before all things it was necessary that she should first prove her rights.

The next morning came a long letter from Fanny. There is a wonderful pleasure in reading a long letter full of minute details respecting one's home, or any locality familiar and endeared — more welcome a thousand times than the most wittily and originally expressed opinion upon abstract topics.

"What a misfortune that Tom should have been called away!" was the opening sentence. "I have been thinking of you ever since I had his letter, for I believe I knew all about it before you did. He is quite vexed himself; and Mr. Wall not come back yet! It is really too bad! You must be so miserable all alone in that awful London! I would cry my eyes out if I was in your place; but you will not, you are so strong and brave!

"It has been horribly wet ever since you

left, and I have only taken three pounds eleven and sevenpence halfpenny, but Mrs. Jennings called and paid her account at last.

“I have had tea with Mills since you left, and we sit by the kitchen fire, so we do not keep the parlour fire in. She has made great progress with the stockings she is knitting for you ; but conversation is rather a difficulty. I don’t think Mills values my opinions as she ought, so I proposed reading to her. She was very pleased ; but I didn’t think of her deafness, and now I don’t like to go back ; so, if I shout at you when I return, do not be surprised. We are going through the ‘History of Pierstoffs.’ You remember you bought it last spring. But I am surprised to find how sceptical she is : she has grave doubts that it ever was so poor a place as it is represented to have been. The grey cat is much better, and his coat is looking quite handsome again. Shall I have the garden done up ? Some of the trees want pruning.

“Such a funny thing happened to-day ! I was in the shop after dinner, setting up some screens in the window, when a sporting-looking man, well dressed, though not a gentleman, I think, strolled past. He was a

stranger, evidently, and yet his face was familiar to me. He stared very impudently, and, I am afraid, he *winked* as he went by; but I had hardly got back behind the counter before he returned and walked in.

“ ‘Have you any—any——?’ He stopped, looked round, as if trying to find something he could ask for. ‘Oh, ah, gloves—that will do. I want a pair of dogskin driving-gloves.’

“ ‘We only keep ladies’ gloves,’ said I, with dignity, I flatter myself.

“ ‘Well, it’s a mistake,’ said he, sitting down and rapping his teeth with a queer little stick he carried. ‘Gentlemen pay better, and are easier served, especially by a charming young lady like you.’

“I can’t tell you how indignant and frightened I felt. You never saw such a horrid man! He had a white face and a red nose, and was altogether dreadful. Before I could think of anything grand and cutting to reply, he went on: ‘Now, I’d lay long odds you never were behind a counter before! Your pretty fingers are not used to handle a yard wand! A pair of white reins from the bits of a couple of thorough-breds are the ribbons *you* ought to handle! I have a notion I had the

pleasure of meeting you before. Haven't I the honour of speaking to Miss de Burgh?' and he stood up and made a wonderful bow, raising his horrible white hat ever so high. I didn't know what to do, and I just said, 'No, indeed I am not.' How I wished for you! 'Then,' said he, 'if not, what may your name be?' It flashed across me that he might be one of the detectives Tom talked about so; so I said very steadily—though, believe me, I was shaking in my shoes (boots, I mean)—'I don't see what my name can possibly be to a stranger like you, sir. Can I show you anything?' 'That's a hint, by Jupiter!' he cried, with a roar of laughter. 'Do I look like a fellow that would work Berlin wool, or crochet? No, nothing, thank you, my dear Miss de Burgh, unless, indeed, you can tell me where a young chap called Turner hangs out. He says his governor is a big-wig here! Do you know the name?' I told him the only Turner I knew here was Turner and Co., the great drapery shop. Then he gave a great roar of laughter, and, taking off his hat again, he said, 'Good-morning, Miss de Burgh,' and walked away. I really felt quite ill after, and I puzzled over his face all day, but only this

evening at tea it jumped into my head who he is. I am certain he is the same man that spoke to Tom the day I was at Waterloo Station on my way to you, dearest Kate, years ago—that is, two! And he is just the sort of creature to be a detective, or an informer of some kind. I have been miserable ever since. What could he want with that unfortunate young Turner? No good, I am certain! Do make haste and come back soon; we are lost without you! I am longing for an account of your visit to Captain Gregory! Lady Styles has not been here since. Ever your loving friend,

“FANNY LEE.

“P.S.—Have I not written you a splendid letter? It would do for a chapter in one of Tom’s stories! I hope ours will end in proper story-fashion — with virtue, you, me, and Tom, rewarded; and vice, Sir Hugh, Ford, &c., &c., punished, though they are not very vicious, after all.”

Kate read this curious story a second time, and set herself to think the matter over steadily. She had forgotten the encounter at the Waterloo Station, if she had ever heard

of it; but the description, and allusion to Tom's knowledge of the mysterious stranger, induced her to conclude that he could be no other than the missing Trapes. She did not see what possible connection could exist between this man, Ford, and her own affairs. His acquaintance with Poole was accidental, and not difficult to account for, but his connection with Ford was utterly incongruous—a mystery she could not understand. The more she reflected upon the matter, the more she acknowledged that there was no evidence whatever of Ford's complicity in the scheme to defraud her—nothing but her own unreasonable instinctive conviction; but to that, after arguing round a whole circle of probabilities, she returned as tenaciously as ever.

It was a bright, crisp morning—a morning that asked you to go out—but Kate felt bound to resist. She felt, while she smiled at her dilemma, that she could not venture to take “her walks abroad” with an empty pocket. No, she would stay indoors and wait patiently for Fanny's letter and remittance, which would be sure to reach her to-morrow.

Meantime a minute search in her travelling-

bag resulted in a "treasure-trove" of five-pence-halfpenny, and Kate felt positively at ease when she put this slight store in her pocket. "How dreadful it must be to be absolutely penniless," she thought—"penniless, with little children crying to you for bread! Yet, what power, what perseverance, what ingenuity, the consciousness that you had them to provide for would bestow! The worst poverty is genteel poverty, after all—the loss of caste in the enforced abandonment of the gentlewoman's habits and appearance. The position of women is growing more and more false every day: we cannot find men to work for us, and if we push our own way we are supposed to forfeit our ladyhood and womanliness! Can it be that these graces, which ought to be innate, really depend on the purse? Is it possible we are compelled to admit the materialist conviction, that there is a money reason at the bottom of everything? I cannot! the common sense of mankind will right this in the future, for though its manifestations are very intermittent, there is a great deal of common sense in the world, or it would be a vast lunatic asylum.

But the idea of a money question sent her

to her personal expenditure book, over which she severely took herself to task for various unnecessary though trifling outlays which she considered self-indulgent. To be prudent and economical was no easy task to Kate Travers. Naturally appreciating artistic elegance—ugliness and vulgarity in her surroundings were positively painful. A large liberality, never stopping to count the cost of what she bestowed, was inherent in her; moreover, the physical perfection of her frame disposed her to a certain luxurious indolence. It is your nervous, unequally developed nature that prompts to restless action and objectless self-denial—the richer, fuller being is content to stand at ease and wait, confident in its own force when the moment for action comes. Moreover, it was an enormous advantage to her that her intellect had been so much cultivated before passion had stirred from the sleep of childhood. As yet her idea of passion was an intellectual flame: she did not realize the strong human necessity of contact; she did not perceive that even “through the laying on of the Apostles’ *hands* the Holy Ghost was given.”

But the great corrective to Kate’s most

deeply-rooted faults, pride and an imperious will, was an inexhaustible sense of justice to others, or rather a sympathising equity, which is above the rigidity of barren justice. A tender equity, ever ready to pay the fines it was compelled to inflict—this, and a sturdy independence, a shrinking from obligation—money obligation—kept the current of her energy from stagnating, and gave to her air and manner the indescribable restfulness of strength.

When Hugh Galbraith reached his hotel the previous evening he was informed that Colonel Upton had engaged rooms, and gone out, intending to dine at the club. Thither Galbraith followed, but did not find him ; and, rather to his satisfaction, dined alone. The evening was long, though assisted in its course by a game or two of billiards with a chance acquaintance who happened to drop in, for in October the clubs present a deserted aspect.

The chums, therefore, did not meet till breakfast next morning, when Galbraith, having made up his mind on more points than one, was impenetrable and imperturbable.

"What became of you last night?" he asked, boldly taking the initiative.

"Well, that is cool!" exclaimed Upton, looking up from his poached egg and broiled ham. "Pray what became of you when you deserted me in that extraordinary fashion yesterday? You are not afraid of a tip on the shoulder? Are you a spiritualist, and had you a sudden communication? I looked down the platform pretty sharp I can tell you, and I could see no moving cause for such extraordinary conduct—come explain, explain!"

"That is just what I am not going to do," returned Galbraith, calmly, "at least not at present."

"You said you would."

"I have changed my mind. I could not tell you all, old fellow, so I will not open the subject."

"So be it," returned Upton resignedly; then, after an interval of eating, he resumed, "Pray, am I still to have the pleasure of your company to Ireland?"

"No," said Galbraith.

"Nice treatment; but I expected as much. Is it indiscreet to ask what you are going to do with yourself this morning?"

"It is ; but I will answer you. I am going to a police station."

"Why, in the name of Heaven?"

"To try and trace a thief."

"Then I believe I am on a wrong scent."

"That is very likely."

"One word, Galbraith. Was the cause of your sudden defalcation at H——, male or female?"

"I decline to answer," said Galbraith smiling.

"It was a woman," cried Upton triumphantly.



CHAPTER IV.

THE long bright morning hung heavily on Kate's hands. She wrote a description of the previous day's adventures to her friend and partner ; but that did not fill up all the time, though it carried her on well towards her midday chop. She tried to read, but an odd nervous anticipation distracted her attention. That Hugh Galbraith would make his appearance, she was quite sure—the only question was, when? Kate was too wise and womanly a woman, however, to be without the resource of needle-work, which, as many a weary sister could testify, has a calming, satisfying influence of its own. She had carried with her a large

piece of cloth appliqué work, and the intricacy of the pattern served to divert her thoughts. She had, however, hardly thus disposed of an hour, when the sound of a rapidly approaching cab woke the echoes of the dull little street. The sound came near, ceased an instant, and then the conveyance seemed to drive away. An uncomfortable, uneasy beating of the heart made Kate's fingers unsteady.

"What folly and weakness!" she exclaimed to herself. "I must conquer both."

"A gentleman for you, ma'am," said the landlady, throwing open the door, and the next moment her hand was in Hugh Galbraith's.

"I had hoped to be here earlier, Mrs. Temple," he said, in the easiest tone possible; for all his native pertinacity was roused and concentrated on preserving the character of friendship which he had adopted, until it led him—where?—well, he did not at present care to ask. "I had hoped to be earlier, but I found I had to run down to H——, for the affair must be managed by the local police;—however, here I am at last." He laid aside his hat as he spoke, and sat down, uninvited, at the opposite side of the table.

"What trouble you have taken," said Mrs. Temple, gathering courage as she noticed his manner, and the tranquil glance with which he met her eyes—"and I fear you have had your trouble for nothing."

"Not absolutely. The police are not quite without hopes of recovering your money. They know that a certain swell-mobsman was at a sale of somebody's stud, near Lillington, and they are on his tracks. If you knew the number of your note, I fancy it might be all right."

"It is very unfortunate! I drew it out of the bank the afternoon before I started for London, last Monday, and as I was very busy, I omitted to enter the number—a disgraceful oversight for a woman of business," she added smiling.

"I fear you will have to pay a rather heavy forfeit in consequence. By the way, the bank people would know the number! Why don't you telegraph to them? I'll go to the nearest office and do it for you—they can telegraph back directly—and if you send me a line to-night, I can see the inspector to-morrow, the first thing." He stretched out his hand towards his hat as he spoke.

"Stop, stop!" cried Kate, "let me think for a moment."

"There is really nothing to think about," said Galbraith, who could not understand her hesitation, while she confusedly thought of all the mischief that would possibly and probably arise from his becoming mixed up with her affairs. "It would be better to telegraph herself," so she said, looking earnestly into Galbraith's grave eyes, and then she remembered her bankrupt condition.

"But the nearest office is a long way off," he urged—"somewhere near Oxford Street, I suspect" (it was before the days of postal telegraphs)—"better leave it to me."

"But the bank people will not tell you anything—they will only do so to me."

"I will telegraph in your name, and give your address."

"Then telegraph to Fanny!" cried Mrs. Temple eagerly. "She can go to the bank; they know her, and will give her the information, and she will lose no time."

"What's the hour now?" said Galbraith, looking at his watch—"two-thirty—barely time. I wish I had not sent off my cab. I will drive down to the office as quickly as I can, and return immediately."

"I am sure, Sir Hugh——" began Mrs. Temple, but he was gone, and a vigorous slam of the front door announced his exit. "He is really very good," thought Kate. "It is a great pity we ever became enemies, or that he made the ridiculous mistake of fancying himself in love with me. He has evidently got over it, and is anxious I should think so. I must not on any account seem to look on him as a lover, but accept his friendship frankly! I wonder why he is coming back—he has said his say, and we really have very few topics in common? Perhaps he will not return. He is wonderfully alert—quite another creature!"

But he did return, and sooner than she thought possible.

"I have accomplished my errand," he said cheerfully, reseating himself in the place he had occupied, and throwing open the front of his overcoat, as if he intended staying.

"But you must forgive me for exercising a little discretionary variation from your instructions. I sent the message straight to the bank—there was really no time to spare."

"I suppose it was best; but I trust you used my name. The whole of Pierstoffe

would be hysterical with curiosity if *you* telegraphed on my behalf!"

"I am not quite blockhead enough to do so," replied Galbraith a little indignantly. "I daresay," looking at his watch, "you'll have the answer before six."

"I hope and trust he is not going to sit there and wait for it," thought Kate. His next words reassured her,—

"If you can post to me by six, I shall get the note to-night. There is my address," laying his card on the table; "and I know yours is the pen of a ready writer."

Mrs. Temple smiled, and tried to keep back a slight blush that would come in spite of her.

"It's so unfortunate that I—I mean my friend Mr. Tom, is away, or I should not have given you all this trouble; but indeed, Hugh" (the name slipped out quite unnoticed by her, so accustomed had she been for years to think and speak of him as "Hugh." He shot a quick, keen glance at her, saw her unconsciousness, and shaded his face with his hand for a moment while she finished her sentence) —"indeed, you need do nothing further in the matter. To-morrow I shall be liberated,

for I am certain to have money from Fanny, and I can follow up the quest myself, if you will be so good as to tell me the proper quarter to apply to."

"Ah," said Galbraith, looking at her, "then you did not go down to your solicitor as you said you would?"

"No," she returned; then, laughing at his suspicious air, added, "I *have* one, nevertheless, I am sorry to say; but on second thoughts I resolved to send home for what I required."

"I suspect you had not the wherewithal to charter a cab," said he, laughing. "That came of being too proud to borrow a little filthy lucre from me."

"A cab, indeed!" cried Kate. "Do you suppose a hard-working tradeswoman like myself, up in town on troublesome business, would indulge in cabs? No; an omnibus is the extent of my luxury. At any rate, I shall be in funds to-morrow, and able to manage my own affairs, so pray take no further trouble. I do not see why I need write to you to-night. I can see the inspector and give him the number of the note myself."

"You must not think of doing so," replied Galbraith, very earnestly. "It is not pleasant for a delicate, refined woman to go about alone to these places. I cannot allow you to do so, unless, indeed, you will let me accompany you. Besides, as I began the affair, you had much better let me finish it. Two inquirers will only create confusion."

Kate thought a moment. "Has my name appeared at all?"

"No," said Galbraith; "there was no necessity to mention it. A lady had lost her purse, and I was the agent in the matter."

If, then, no one was to know of her being even temporarily mixed up with her enemy, she would not mind so much.

"Well, then, as you are so good," she said slowly, and looking down, fairly beaten by his pertinacity and resolution. "I suppose a day or two will see it ended one way or the other? If not, you must promise me to give it up. I can always get my solicitor to assist me, you know."

"Ay, and he will charge no end of six-and-eightpences! Believe me, you had better leave it to your unpaid *attaché*."

"Let me substitute unattached assistant,"

said Kate, laughing and colouring most becomingly, "and I agree."

"So be it," returned Sir Hugh thoughtfully, "so be it;" after an instant's pause he added, "and you will write, then, this evening?"

"Yes, I will write."

"As soon as I have seen the police people in the morning, I will come here. In the meantime, what a frightfully dull day you will have of it!"

"I do not mind being alone—at least I should not if I had not an interview with a solicitor before me," she replied with a little sigh.

"How long do you remain in town?" asked Galbraith, standing up and taking his hat, yet lingering still.

"That depends on my solicitor. I hope to leave on Tuesday. It is not very cheerful here."

"I should think not. I must say good-morning, Mrs. Temple."

"Good-morning, Sir Hugh. By-the-by, I shall be out to-morrow morning, so pray do not take the trouble of coming all this way—a note will tell me all that is necessary."

His face clouded over. "I believe you are frank enough to speak the real truth," he said. "Do you distinctly wish me to stay away?"

Kate hesitated ; she half wished he would, but only half. Moreover, if she forbade his visits, would it not be confessing that she did not consider him emancipated from his character of a lover? No, she would secure his kindly, friendly feeling—that would be some provision against future difficulties. So, looking straight into his eyes, she said with a bright smile,—

"No, I do not. You know we can be friends for a few days while the shop is out of sight, and inequalities forgotten," and she held out her hand.

Galbraith took it quickly, pressing it for an instant almost painfully tight. "Friends, anyhow," said he, "shop or no shop!" Then, turning away with the words, "Till to-morrow, then," he left the house.

When he was gone, Kate sat down, leaning her elbows on the table and burying her face in her hands. "I wonder if I am doing right in letting him have so much of his own way? Will he think me a treacherous wretch

by-and-by? What can I do? I cannot forego my rights to save his feelings. I am almost stupid enough to do so; but what would Tom and Fanny say? I could not be so weak; besides, I may never succeed, and if I fail I shall hate him again—there is such unreasoning prejudice in his contemptuous disregard and disbelief in any caste save his own. He chooses from some whim to credit me with an ancestry, because he knows nothing about it. I almost wish I had no drop of so-called gentle blood in my veins, were it only to contradict his theories. How out of place such a feudal individual is in the middle of the nineteenth century, and yet ——” What extenuations her intellect or heart might have urged on Hugh’s behalf remained unsuggested, for the landlady put in her head.

“I was thinking, ma’am, as the gentleman is gone, you’ll be wanting your tea.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Small, I shall be glad of some.”

Meantime Galbraith walked away south-eastwards, in deep self-communing.

There was no mistake about it. Mrs. Temple had called him “Hugh” familiarly,

unconsciously ; and never had the harsh name sounded sweetly to him before. It was impossible she could have made such a mistake (as she would have considered it) had she not thought of him tolerably often ; not as Sir Hugh Galbraith, Bart., of Kirby Grange, but as one near enough, if not dear enough, to be enshrined in her memory as "Hugh" simply. What did it mean ? When he so abruptly, and almost rudely, asked her to be his wife, her tone and manner indicated complete freedom from the least tendency to reciprocate his feelings. The most conceited blockhead that ever curled his whiskers and waxed his moustaches could not mistake it for concealed preference or any other sentimental indication. It was as downright a refusal as ever man received, though not unfeeling. Yet—she called him "Hugh !" Was she coming round to him ? Galbraith's veins thrilled at the idea. Though by no means a self-conceited man, like most others of his stamp, it never occurred to his mind that any woman in the world was too good for him. Still Mrs. Temple had hitherto been an unattainable good, and now a gleam of hope, faint though it was, seemed to dazzle him.

But how about those battles which he had fought with himself during his lonely rambles and cruisings in the north? He had then come to the conclusion that it was well, after all, he had been rejected, though he should never again have the chance of finding such a glorious helpmate as Kate would be; but that past of hers, which she was so unwilling to reveal, what did it contain? Nothing really bad—nothing. Of that his whole heart acquitted her; but something brought upon her by others, that was possible, and would he not brave that for her sake? Yes, if she had loved him; but was it not well that she did not? Hugh Galbraith was sensitively alive to the honour of the family name. True, his father had somewhat tarnished it, but not in the world's estimation, for he (Hugh) had helped him to pay his debts; but to marry a woman who was in any way touched by disgrace, no weakness would tempt him to such a step he once thought, and now accident, the drift of a woman's fancy, was perhaps his only safeguard. If, therefore, the unconscious use of his name was an indication that the tide was turning in his favour, would it not be wise to seek safety in flight, instead

of courting danger by every means in his power? Common sense had no hesitation in answering, but passion, imagination, and self-will are a troublesome team; and if Galbraith could have brought himself even to will obedience to the dictates of prudence, I doubt if he could have followed them, though it is a moot point. "To will" anything is, I suppose, to do it; but this is not a metaphysical treatise. Willing or not, Galbraith determined to see the present act of the drama played out. "If I impress her with an idea of my friendly interest, she may open her heart and tell me her story. She is evidently very much isolated; and at any rate for the next three or four days I shall have her all to myself in this wilderness of brick and mortar."

So reflecting, Galbraith hailed a hansom and rattled away to his club.

The next morning, having been relieved from her embarrassing penniless condition by a post-office order from Fanny, enclosed in an effusive letter, full of dismay and sympathy, Kate sallied forth to leave a note she had written, requesting an interview the following

morning at Mr. Wall's office, intending to assure herself that he had arrived the previous night.

Her note to Galbraith had cost her much thought. The "reply wire," as it is familiarly termed in busy offices, did not reach her till seven o'clock the evening before; and she decided to enclose the telegram as it was, which she did, merely saying, "This moment received. Yours, with many thanks, K. T."

She felt a joyous feeling of relief at being able once more to walk boldly forth, and this buoyancy carried her lightly and rapidly to her destination.

She was recognised by the clerk, who sat in a sort of wooden cage near the door, where he noted down the entrances of the seekers of justice or injustice, and he paid her immediate and polite attention.

"Note for Mr. Wall, madam? Certainly, it shall be given to him directly he arrives."

"I am told he was to return last night."

"Unfortunately he is detained at Dieppe by a severe cold, and fears he cannot travel till Monday."

"I am very, very sorry for every reason;"

and Kate felt almost choked with a lump that would rise in her throat.

"Will you step in, madam, and speak to Mr. Wreford?"

"No, thank you; it would be of no avail."

She turned away, all her buoyancy gone—everything seemed against her. Five pounds lost, and another costly week in London probably before her, while her presence was so sorely needed at Pierstoffe. She felt too much cast down to face the long walk back, so she took refuge in an omnibus.

The next day was Sunday, a rather wearisome day under any circumstances, but doubly so in a small temporary London lodging.

Kate was half amused, half angry with herself for the sort of disappointment she had felt at the non-appearance of Galbraith on the previous day. She was naturally anxious, though not very hopeful, about her five pounds; but over and above this motive she would have been thankful for the seasonable break in the depressing monotony of the day, which his presence, and perhaps a little argument, would have afforded.

To-day he would not of course come. Men like him generally went away somewhere to

avoid the sepulchral aspect of a London sabbath. Moreover, a Sunday visit implied a certain degree of intimacy.

"To be sure," thought Kate, as she tied on her bonnet before going to church, "our acquaintance is altogether exceptional—a sort of byway not amenable to the rules that govern the turnpike-roads of good-society."

She walked some distance to hear a celebrated preacher, and then, as the weather, though not wet, was dull and chill and misty, resigned herself to remain indoors, made up a bright fire, and drawing a low folding-chair—the only tolerably comfortable seat in the room near the hearth, selected the toughest book of those provided by Tom Reed's kindly thought, and settled herself for a few hours' reading. But her attention was not quite so steady as she expected; she caught herself listening to the passing vehicles, which were few and far between, although she had quite made up her mind that Galbraith would not come on Sunday.

Half an hour had hardly passed thus, when something drove up very rapidly and stopped suddenly. Then an impatient rap with the diminutive knocker, which sounded on the

thin, unseasoned wood more like "the woodpecker tapping on the hollow beech tree" than the regulation "thunder-claps" which "Jeames" used to discharge upon aristocratic entrances before bells had superseded knockers. The next moment Galbraith was bidding her "Good-morning."

"Could not manage to come up here yesterday till it was later than you might have liked," he began, drawing a chair opposite her as she resumed her seat, making himself quite at home, to Kate's amusement; yet her amusement was tinged with shades of compassion and regret. "I did not get your note till nearly twelve o'clock yesterday," continued Galbraith. "I stayed at the club till after the last delivery the night before, and began to think you had changed your mind, and were going to cast me adrift. However, your note explained all, short as it was. I have received very few letters from ladies in my life, and I have always understood that brevity is not their characteristic, but yours was literally but three words."

"Yet it told you all that was necessary," said Kate smiling.

"Very true. Well, when I got down to

H—— the inspector was gone away somewhere, and I had to wait some time. He was very glad to get the number of the note, and said he thought they might manage it now. That is literally all I have to tell you, Mrs. Temple."

"Thank you very much." Then, after a little pause, she added, "Of course I must give some reward; there will be something to pay?"

"A mere trifle. The police are paid for their work by Government, and I daresay you contribute quite enough in the shape of taxes towards their maintenance."

There was a pause—neither knew exactly what to say next, though their hearts were full enough.

"And are you off on Tuesday?" asked Sir Hugh at last.

"No. I am sorry to say I find the solicitor I wanted to see does not return till Monday, and" (with a sigh) "he may not return even then. So I have not a very lively prospect before me; and I want so much to return."

"It is very annoying," said Galbraith sympathisingly, though a subdued smile lit up

his eyes. "However, I hope you will have as little as possible to do with lawyers and law."

"I am on the brink of a lawsuit, I believe," replied Kate, urged by she knew not what impulse to approach the deep but narrow gulf between them, of which her companion was so unconscious.

"Well, pull up before you are absolutely over," said Galbraith, earnestly. "I was once very near going in for one myself."

"Why did you not?" she asked, gazing away into the fire.

"Because I got what I wanted without it."

"I will give up mine on the same terms," retorted Kate, with a thoughtful smile. "Perhaps my adversary may come to some accommodation, as it is termed. Tell me, have you ever found any trace of the lady you were in search of?"

"What lady?" asked Galbraith, looking puzzled.

"Perhaps I am indiscreet in alluding to the subject; but in a letter I once wrote for you, you made some inquiries about your uncle's, or some relation's widow."

"Yes, yes, of course. I am not in the habit of thinking of her as a lady. You

mean Mrs. Travers. No; we can find no trace of her whatever. It is very curious," he continued, musingly, "the way she has vanished. I mean, I cannot account for her rejection of my offers; it is not in keeping with what I imagine the character of her class."

"What was her class?"

"Tradespeople; at least, I heard she was niece or relation to a man who used to supply old Travers with fishing-tackle. I think Travers took the lodgings, where he met her, through him. She was daughter to the woman of the house. Whether she acted as servant or not, I do not know; at any rate, she fascinated my deluded relative; but if the right will had not turned up, she should have had a tussle for the property."

"Do you imagine she will ever try to disturb your possession of it?" asked Kate, leaning forward to replace a piece of coal which had fallen from the fire.

"No; that is quite out of the question. The will could not be upset; but I confess it is very hard lines for her to be sent adrift upon the world without a rap, after living in luxury for a few years."

"It seems cruelly unjust."

"It does," returned Galbraith, thoughtfully; "and I always fancy poor old Travers must have found out some wrongdoing of hers to induce him to make so great a change in his intentions. My own idea," he went on, as if speaking to himself, "is that there was something going on between her and that clerk."

"What clerk?" asked Kate, quietly.

"Ford, the manager. He knew her before her marriage—knew her well, from what he has admitted to me; and there was always something devilish queer, a sort of sentimental kind of restraint in his tone when speaking of her, that suggested the notion that all was not right. Then there was the five hundred pounds bequeathed to Ford in the first will, and never mentioned in the second. I think it is all very suspicious!"

"What do you suspect?" said Kate, rising and taking a paper screen from the chimney-piece to shade her face.

"Various delinquencies," returned Galbraith, with a grim smile. "Perhaps they agreed to marry, and share the money after the poor old fellow's death. If such a thing came to his knowledge—and a stray letter or a moment's incaution might betray them—

such a will as Travers left would be the best sort of revenge."

"But have they married—this Mr. Ford and your friend's widow?" asked Kate.

"No—not that I know of; though they may. I can hardly believe Ford to be as ignorant of her whereabouts as he pretends. They may have married privately, but in any case I do not think either can disturb *me*. I hope you are as safe to win your cause, whatever it may be, as I am in my possession!"

"I should expect any wickedness from a woman base enough to plan marriage with another during her husband's lifetime."

"Well, it is only my supposition, Mrs. Temple, and you must remember her perception of right and wrong was no doubt much less delicate and acute than that of a woman of your class. It is absurd to attribute the feelings and motives of our grade to those in a lower strata."

"‘My class,’ ‘our grade,’" repeated Kate, turning her eyes full upon him. "What difference is there between your cousin's wife and myself? I keep a small shop—I let lodgings——"

"With as fatal a result," put in Galbraith,

an unusual sparkle of fun gleaming in his eyes. The remark was irresistible.

"Hush, hush," returned Kate, good-humouredly, pleased at the lightness of his tone. "We have agreed to forget all temporary insanities ; but why should not this lady—well, this young woman—not possess as keen a sense of honour as you credit me with?"

"Because it's not natural. She might be honest enough to keep from any wrongdoing during her husband's lifetime, but not have the delicacy to resist planning what would do him no actual material harm. It is the associations, the habits of life, the tone of everyone and everything around that makes a gentlewoman what she is, or ought to be."

"'Ought to be' is well put in, Sir Hugh. Does nature, which is after all the groundwork for our embroideries—forgive a professional illustration—does nature count for nothing? The true kindly instincts of the heart—and, remember, the highest good breeding is but the outward and visible sign of this inward grace—will often make the humblest woman act with both delicacy and tact. Have you never met with absolute vulgarity in high places? And let me assure you,

though you choose to imagine me—I scarce know what—my people are and were what I am, shopkeepers, not on a large scale.”

“I do not care what they were. I only know you look like a princess very slightly disguised.” As Galbraith said this he leant his arms upon the table, looking straight at her, pleasantly, frankly, but not in the least like a lover.

“I claim to be more than a princess, whatever my faults may be,” returned Kate, speaking softly as if to herself. “I claim to be a true-hearted woman.”

A silence ensued, which both felt to be dangerous, yet Galbraith dared not speak. At length Kate’s thoughts, having shot along some curiously interwoven lines of association, suddenly stopped on the topic of Galbraith’s antagonism.

“But why have you so strong an antipathy to this woman—this widow?”

“I certainly had a very strong antipathy to her.”

“Had?” repeated Kate. “Is it, then, passed by?”

“Well, yes; one generally feels more amiable to a defeated enemy.”

"True; still, why did you hate her? Did she injure you?"

"She did. She extinguished the hopes of my whole life," returned Galbraith, earnestly. "Travers always led me to suppose I was to be his heir, and I had perfect trust in his justice. He was as cold and dry and hard as a piece of granite, and he was a gentleman of the same blood as myself; if it did not sound absurd to talk of sympathy (I have picked up the word from you, Mrs. Temple) between two such men as Travers and myself, I should say there was a good deal. I really felt like a son, or rather a younger brother, towards him. If he had come to grief, I would have shared my last shilling with him; not as a mere duty, for I owed him that much, but gladly; and then to find him throwing me over for a mere bit of vulgar prettiness, a girl nearly young enough to be his grand-daughter—not even a gentlewoman!—at his age! I never felt so disgusted, by heaven! I was as much cut up at having my respect for the old man destroyed, as at seeing my prospects go overboard. Nor do I believe Travers would ever have been so unjust, so unlike himself, if a strong pressure had not been brought to bear

upon him. I think his ultimate action proves that he found he had made a mistake, and was anxious to atone. Still he must have had some strong reason for disinheriting the wife; and they lived peacefully together to the last. That is the strangest part of the story," added Galbraith, thoughtfully.

"It is, indeed," said Kate, who had listened with avidity and a beating heart to this long speech—unusually long for Galbraith—and now only forced herself to speak, lest her silence should permit him to wander from the subject. "I cannot, indeed, wonder at your hating this obnoxious woman." She was unconscious of the earnest, appealing gaze she poured into his eyes as she spoke, but it rivetted his attention, and swept the wicked widow and his wrongs out of his thoughts. "Still," urged Kate, speaking soft and low, "she may have been innocent of any intention to harm you. She might have been very poor and desolate, as I think I suggested to you once before, and poverty is more terrible than you can know—real poverty. When your kinsman asked her to be his wife, she knew nothing of you or your hopes; she may never have influenced him against you. Are you

sure that in your anger you did nothing to offend this Mr. Travers?" How strange it was to speak thus of her dead husband to her foe!

"Why, yes. I certainly wrote a letter on the spur of the moment which could not be exactly pleasant to him or the female on whom he had been pleased to bestow his name. But I don't regret it; I should do the same thing again. However, he did not like it, for he never replied, and I only heard vague reports of him for the next two or three years. Then came the news of his death, and of that infamous first will. The widow wrote me an insolent letter through her solicitors, offering me a third of the property as a free gift; but the idea of being under an obligation to her for what ought to have been my own, was more than I could stand," and Galbraith, warming with his subject, started up as if to pace the room; but its narrow limits forbid that favourite exercise, so he resumed his seat, and listened attentively to his companion's words.

"It was not such an illiberal offer after all," she was saying thoughtfully.

"I grant that. It was more; it was rather

an extraordinary offer, and meant to keep me quiet ; for I fancy she knew the second will existed, or feared I might find a flaw in the first. Of course, had I agreed to accept her terms, I could have made no move against her under the first will ; and no one could have foreseen that a curious accident should have led Ford to discover the second one. Fortunately he was an honest man, or, rather, rational enough not to risk a felony, so he handed it over to my solicitors or her solicitors, and it was all right."

"For you—yes! Then, the sum of your opinion is, that this Mrs. Travers strove to alienate your benefactor's affections from you ; was found out in some disgraceful intrigue ; was ready to bribe you to silence, and to destroy the will made by her husband under the influence of his just indignation against her ?"

"Yes ; that is a tolerably accurate outline."

"Never say again that you are an unimaginative man, Sir Hugh Galbraith," said Mrs. Temple slowly, in an altered voice. "You have built up an ingenious theory on very small foundation."

"Perhaps so. I confess this woman's disappearance has puzzled me. Sometimes I think it shows that she is all right, with more in her than I gave her credit for. Sometimes I think her keeping out of my way a confession of guilt; still I don't like to think of her being in want or difficulty. And, by Jove, I will find her! But I must have bored you with my affairs, Mrs. Temple. One of the privileges of friendship, you know! I can't tell how it is, but I think I talk more to you than to any one else."

"I am interested in your story, Sir Hugh; that is the reason. But I tell you candidly I am disposed to take sides with the widow against you."

"That of course. You are always in opposition. Still I fancy I am right in the main. I have heard traits of Mrs. Travers—small indications of the current, that show she is grasping and selfish and mean. She cannot be so pretty either! Ford said she had reddish hair, and of course she was bad style."

"I suppose she was," said Kate composedly; "but if she were to make any attempt to disturb you?"

"Oh, I should fight every inch of ground. If my whole fortune went in law, she should have none of it."

"Would you resist a *just* claim?"

"It could not be just, you see. Nothing could upset the last will."

Kate sighed.

"I have been trespassing on you unconscionably," said Galbraith. "The shades of evening are closing, and I had better go. If you admit me to-morrow, I will promise not to prose about myself."

"To-morrow," returned Kate dreamily. "Are you coming to-morrow?"

"Yes, of course," cried Galbraith boldly, though for half a second he had hesitated whether he should say so, or ask permission to come. "I hope to bring you your money to-morrow. When is this solicitor of yours to return?"

"To-morrow, I hope," said Kate with a sigh.

"I suspect you will be in the down-belows until you see him."

"And perhaps after," she said smiling. "Good-bye, Sir Hugh."

"The fight will be a bitter one," thought Kate, as she sat alone after her tea. "But I am bound to carry it through. In justice to myself I must show that my poor husband never for a moment doubted me. I wonder if Hugh Galbraith's friendship,"—even in her thoughts she emphasised "friendship,"—"will stand the test of discovering my identity with 'the female to whom his cousin was pleased to give his name!' Will not the surreptitious winning of his——well——regard, be my crowning iniquity? Oh, Hugh! I do not want to rob you of what ought, indeed, to be your own."

But Monday brought no Mr. Wall, nor Tuesday, nor Wednesday; nevertheless they brought Hugh Galbraith with almost undeviating regularity to the commonplace little cottage, which was a corner of paradise, though an uneasy paradise to him.

Kate felt a little worried by his visits. She felt she ought not to allow them; but she was an exceedingly unconventional woman, and a fearless one. Moreover, she was interested in her visitor. She did not acknowledge it to herself, but she would have missed him.

There was a subtle pleasure to her in the sense that she was charming to him ; that Kate Temple was thus revenging the injuries of Catherine Travers. Yet she did not intend any cruelty, any real revenge.

“ When he knows who I am, he will find the knowledge sufficiently repulsive to give me no more trouble,” she thought ; “ and if he is brought to confess that he did Mrs. Travers injustice, he may agree to reasonable arrangements with Mrs. Temple.”

It was very strange to have him sitting there familiarly with her by the fireside in the dusk of the October evenings, just as he might have sat with her in her more stately home had he come back from India on good terms with her husband. No, not exactly. Hugh Galbraith would never have permitted his eyes and voice to speak the language they often did—friendship notwithstanding—had he known her as his cousin’s wife ; and as she thought so, her heart leaped up in a great throb of delight to know that she was free.

It was very strange to be thus swept by the eddy of her life’s current into this still pool for an instant’s rest before she was hurried on again into the rapids. Strange, but also

delightful—more delightful than she confessed even to herself. But then it was only an instant's lull. It must not, should not, last longer.



CHAPTER V.

THE only result of Mrs. Temple's daily visits of inquiry to the office of Messrs. Wall and Wreford was the promised communication from Captain Gregory, enclosing a letter of his late father's with his signature, which she placed carefully with the documents Tom Reed had left her for Mr. Wall's information. Kate felt greatly tempted to proceed to Doctors' Commons and compare the writing with that upon the will, but she feared to take any step without either Reed's or Mr. Wall's knowledge. She therefore strove to possess her soul in patience till the moment for action came.

Tom wrote also. He had paid the last

tribute of respect to the remains of his chief, and hoped to be in London within another week. So far there was a slight movement in her enforced stagnation. At last, on Thursday morning, when she had gone down to the office more mechanically than hopefully, she found good tidings. Mr. Wall had arrived the night before, had been at the office that morning for half an hour, had read his letters, and left word that he would be happy to see Mrs. Travers the next day at eleven. (She had left no address, not liking to acknowledge that she bore a feigned name at her lodgings.)

This sudden fulfilment of her long-delayed hope sent her back to her temporary abode somewhat tremulous, with a curious confusion of thought seething and bubbling round one central idea. "To-morrow I am to lay the first charge in the mine that is to shatter Hugh's fortunes! Will he ever accept the fragments back from the hands that wrought the mischief?"

She felt that in her present mood she could not meet Galbraith, so purposely made a long *détour* in order to reach her lodgings after his usual hour for calling.

"The gentleman has been here, ma'am,"

said the landlady, as she opened the door. "He was very sorry to miss you, and asked to come in and write a note: it's on the table."

Kate walked in, looked at it, and then stirred the fire, took off her bonnet and wraps, and even folded them up with mechanical neatness, before she opened the missive. How would this straightforward, rather rigid nature judge her? Would she not seem false and double-dealing in his eyes? Would not his idea of his cousin's widow be confirmed by the line of conduct she had adopted? What did he write about? Perhaps to say he was obliged to leave town and should not see her again. She hoped so; it would be better and wiser. She opened the note, and coloured with pleasure to find her conjecture wrong.

"So sorry not to find you," ran the epistle, in large, ugly, but legible writing; "for I cannot call to-morrow. Obligated to run down to see my sister at Richmond; but hope to call the day after with some intelligence of your five pounds. I trust you have caught the lawyer at last, and found all right.

"Yours very truly,

"HUGH GALBRAITH."

Something had been begun below, and had been carefully obliterated. She had to-morrow, then, perfectly clear for her interview, and for reflection afterwards; but the day after she would see him for the last time as a friend, probably for the last time in any character. Soon he would be a bitterer, probably a more contemptuous foe than ever. And then the thought arose—ought she to see him again? Would it not be wiser and kinder to avoid any further interviews? She blushed to think she had not hitherto avoided them as she ought—she might! Well, now she would check the culpable weakness; she would be firm. If it were possible, after her interview with Mr. Wall the next day, she would leave town on Saturday, and send a few lines of polite acknowledgment to Galbraith. Of the lost five pounds they had almost ceased to speak. She felt it was now but an excuse for meeting. Not altogether blinded by his tolerable assumption of friendliness, Kate had as yet formed but a faint idea of the depth and reality of Galbraith's passion for her. In truth, though mature in some ways, especially in a genial mellowness, resulting from richness of nature rather than the ripening of time,

Kate was only learning the A B C of love. As yet she did not quite recognise the direction in which her own feelings were drifting. The ice of an uncongenial marriage closing over the warm currents of her heart kept it pure and free from all the false mirage-like shadows of the real deity, but ready to receive the fullest, deepest, most indelible impression of the true god once he either smiled or frowned upon her.

As to her lover, whatever chance of recovery he might have had before, the last week of quiet, delicious intercourse had utterly swept away; and with all the force of his will he resolved that nothing but her own resolute rejection of him should separate them. Her past might be doubtful,—he felt certain she could explain everything. That any shadow of dishonour should ever dim those frank, fearless eyes, he would not for a moment believe. Whatever was in the past or future, the spell of her presence had struck the imprisoned fountain of youth and joy that had so long lain congealed in the dark recesses of his soul, and all the world was changed to him.

Having fully determined to explain every-

thing to Mr. Wall, and arrange, if possible, to leave town the next day without seeing Galbraith, Kate started to keep her appointment. It was nearly two years since she had gone into that well-remembered room, with a suppressed sensation of bitter wrath and defeat, to place the will that laid her fortunes low in the hands of the lawyer, and now she was taking the first step towards the recovery of her rights with feelings not a whit less painful.

"Well, Mrs. Travers," said Mr. Wall a little stiffly, "this is a very unexpected visit indeed. I thought you had disappeared altogether."

"And you are not the least glad to see me?"

She took the lawyer's wrinkled hand as she spoke, smiling with pleasant reproachfulness.

"I confess I should have been better pleased had you treated me with more confidence, of which I flatter myself I am not undeserving," replied Mr. Wall, visibly relaxing.

"You deserve, and you have my confidence, my dear sir. I know you are displeased at my concealing my abode from you."

"I am, and naturally. Nor was it judicious to have for your sole confidante a young man—a young man of attractive manners and appearance," he interrupted.

"Instead of one older, certainly, but similar in other respects."

"Ah, my dear lady, that will not do," returned Mr. Wall, smiling in spite of himself, so sweetly and brightly was this morsel of transparent flattery offered.

"Well, well, Mr. Wall, let us speak seriously. I am going to tell you everything—everything—under the seal of confession. Had you known my abode you would have persecuted me to accept Sir Hugh Galbraith's splendid offer of three hundred a year, would you not?"

"I certainly would have urged your acceptance of it," he returned, entrenching himself behind his professional manner once more.

"Well, you see I have escaped *that* by concealing my whereabouts," resumed his client. "Moreover, my chief reason for hiding it was to save you the shock you would have probably felt had you known that I had made up my mind to keep a shop, instead of adopting any genteeler method of earning my bread."

"A shop!" echoed Mr. Wall, infinitely surprised, not to say horrified. "My late respected friend and client's name over a shop!"

"Considering that you believe your respected client capable of leaving the wife he professed to love unprovided for, penniless, to battle alone with the world, you have no right to exclaim at any honest use I may put his name to," said Kate very quietly, "But as I have a higher opinion of him than you have, and never will believe that he was guilty of the cruel will *you* accept, I preserved the respect due—you would say to his name, I say due to his natural prejudices—and did *not* put his name over my—shop,"—a little pause, an arch smile as she pronounced the obnoxious word. "Nay, more, Mr. Wall; I dropped the name altogether."

"Have you been living under a false name, then?" asked Mr. Wall drily, in a tone which implied the highest moral disapprobation, and not only expressed his real feeling, but was a *quid pro quo* for the tone of quiet rebuke she had adopted, and which nettled the orthodox lawyer, as showing too high a spirit of independence for a woman, and a poor woman to

boot. Mr. Wall was a very good, honest man, but thoroughly imbued with the "respectability worship" which pervades so large and so valuable a section of English life. He flattered himself that he had the presumptuous young widow, who was after all reduced to her original nothingness by her husband's eccentric will, at his foot, morally, by the admission she had just made. "You have been living under a false name, then?"

"Precisely," she replied, looking straight into his eyes, with an expression he did not quite like, and very different from the smile that played upon her softly-curved lips.

"And may I ask if you consider such a proceeding respectable?"

"I really never thought about it," she said, slightly raising her eyebrows. "I don't suppose *you* think so. Our habits of thought are no doubt widely different. At any rate, I adopted the name of Temple, and started in the Berlin-wool and fancy-work line. You see, my intercourse with poor Mr. Travers developed my commercial faculties," she went on rapidly. "I established myself at the little seaside town of Pierstoffs; and I have succeeded fairly. I determined to wait there in

humble independence until I could find some evidence on which to found an attempt to upset the will that robbed me. I have found it, and I am come to lay it before you."

As she spoke she drew forth a paper, in which she had written as shortly as possible an account of Tom Reed's interview with Poole—the expert's opinion; Captain Gregory's assertion that the will his father signed must have been executed before the 10th of March, and drawing the lawyer's attention to the great improbability that another totally different will had been made within ten days of that drawn out by Gregory. This she placed upon his desk.

"You are really a wonderful woman, Mrs. Travers," said Mr. Wall, with a sort of reluctant admiration. "Before I look at this, may I ask who supplied the capital for your undertaking?"

"I did, myself. You know Sir Hugh Galbraith could not claim my jewels. I have been completely on my own resources; and I owe no man, or woman either, anything."

Strange! in that office she could speak of Galbraith with something of her old enmity.

The lawyer applied himself to the memo-

randa she had handed him, without another word: even in the eyes of respectability, a woman who can make money is free of this world's blame.

Kate sat very patiently while her adviser perused her statement slowly; oh, how slowly! She even forced herself to take up a morning paper which lay on the office table, that Mr. Wall might feel himself at liberty to take his time. But she did not follow the arguments of the leader with much attention. She kept repeating to herself, "I must not be cast down by anything he says; he will be sure to decry the value of this information." She kept very still, just speaking the exact words necessary to answer an occasional question.

At last, after what seemed a whole hour of suspense, Mr. Wall laid down the paper, stared for a moment or two across the room at vacancy, then, putting his hands in his pockets, he exclaimed, "This is very curious, very!" Kate refrained from speaking, although he was looking to her for words. "I suppose it seems to you proof positive that the will under which Sir Hugh Galbraith takes—is a forgery?"

"Presumptive, at any rate. What does it seem to you?"

"Well—" long drawn out—"strongly presumptive, but not conclusive; far from conclusive. Has Mr. Reed seen this man Poole?—seen him, I mean, on this subject?" tapping the paper.

"No. He rather fears opening it up to Poole, who is a silly sort of man, and still in the office. I suppose I must say Hugh Galbraith's office."

"I must see him. Though I do not wish to encourage any false hopes, Mrs. Travers, this matter must be looked into."

After some pertinent questioning and discussion, from which Kate gathered that the dry old lawyer was more favourable to her views than she had dared to hope, he observed: "It would be folly to open up the subject without securing ample proof, for it will be a costly battle. I need hardly remind you that justice is a costly commodity."

"It is; but in this cause I am prepared to sacrifice all I possess."

"And suppose you are beaten; how afterwards?"

"With this and these," holding out her

hand and then touching her brow, "I shall never starve." Then, after a moment's pause, "but we must not stir openly till we are certain of victory."

"When does your friend, Mr. Reed, return?"

"On Tuesday or Wednesday next, I am almost sure."

"I think I shall wait for him before I take any step; he is a shrewd fellow, as well as I remember, and *remarkably* interested in you."

"He is," returned Kate, smiling at the suspicion of her adviser's tone. "He has taken up my cause almost as warmly as if it were his own."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Mr. Wall drily. "I shall, then, have an able and willing assistant in him. Meantime, I shall look over these papers quietly this evening at home; and I think I should like to see you to-morrow, when I have digested the pabulum you have brought me. Can you call about the same time?"

"Certainly, Mr. Wall; and if you are not likely to want me any more, I think I shall return to Pierstoffe to-morrow afternoon."

"Yes, to be sure. How do you manage

about your shop when you are absent?"—a little emphasis on "shop."

"I have a very capable assistant."

"Well, it was a curious idea to adopt that line of business."

Kate smiled.

"However," continued Mr. Wall, "there is no reason why you should not return to-morrow. I wish to see you only because I wish to give you a more careful opinion than I can offer after such a cursory glance at your case; and I am most anxious to prevent your exciting yourself with unfounded hopes. These will cases are most difficult, most doubtful; and, you see, your adversary is in possession. "However," rising in token of dismissal, "I am sincerely interested in you, Mrs. Travers, though perhaps not so ardently as your friend Mr. Reed, for I acknowledge you have been hardly dealt by; still, if I could have matters arranged as I should wish, I would not have Sir Hugh Galbraith disinherited either. I always looked upon him as Mr. Travers's adopted son—a fine, honourable, well-conducted young man! and if you change places with him, the hardship will be shifted to his shoulders."

"I think with you," returned Kate very earnestly. "Believe me, my motive is not to rob Hugh Galbraith, but to right myself. But when I succeed, my dear sir, I shall trust to your good offices to make a juster division between us than will then be legally possible. You know my theory——"

"There, there, there," interrupted the lawyer; "just as I thought; on this slender suggestion, rather than evidence, you think you have the property in your hand again! And pray what is your theory?"

"I am not quite so sanguine, I assure you," said she, smiling; "though I confess to believing that at the other side of a range of difficulties we shall find success. As to my theory, I believe my late husband did make a second will, and one far more just, probably providing well for me, but leaving the bulk of his property to Hugh Galbraith; and it is for this that the present will has been substituted."

"But by whom, my dear madam, by whom? There is not a soul interested in the matter save yourself and Sir Hugh."

"That is just what we must find out," replied Kate. She could not bring herself to

reveal her true convictions to that dry old lawyer. She was always so ashamed of acknowledging Ford's feelings towards her, it seemed such a lowering of herself. "But I must not keep you," she added hastily; and, bidding Mr. Wall good-morning, she walked slowly down B—— Street, settling her plans in her own mind. There was a train to Stoneborough at 1.20, which would enable her to catch a little sleepy, local one to Pierstoffs at six, and so she would be ready for a quiet, peaceful Sunday at home, without any chance of a disturbing, irritating visit from Hugh Galbraith, whose sombre eyes had of late acquired such a variety of expression, and had begun to produce an effect upon herself she could neither account for nor resist. Small chance indeed of ever meeting him on any terms again. Soon he would be plunged into trouble enough to obliterate any fanciful notions about herself. And then when he knew all! She would not try to imagine his possible condition of mind.

Coming back to the present, Kate remembered she had put a list which Fanny had sent, of divers and sundry articles required for the "Bazaar," in her pocket, and she would now go on to the City and procure

them, so that, after her interview with Mr. Wall the next day, she should have nothing to do but to drive to the train. She accordingly made her way to Holborn, and took "omnibus" to Cheapside.

It was past four o'clock, and already dusk, when Kate neared her abode. She felt weary and utterly cast down. True, Mr. Wall was on the whole less unfavourable than she ventured to hope ; true, she would be to-morrow in her safe, quiet home ; still her native buoyancy seemed to have deserted her. As she walked rather slowly along, she turned over in her mind the terms in which she would write to Hugh Galbraith. Her note must be friendly, neither too warm nor too cold ; slightly playful, she thought, would be best. Here a hansom dashed by ; the occupant glanced through the window, stopped the driver, descended, and paid him hastily ; turning in the opposite direction from whence he came, he was speedily face to face with Mrs. Temple, who had recognised the tall, straight figure directly he had sprung to the ground.

"This is a bit of good fortune for an unlucky fellow, as I generally am," said Gal-

braith, raising his hat and speaking with a degree of animation that formerly was very unusual to him. "If I had not been looking this side, I should have driven on to your lodgings and missed you again."

"I thought you were to be at Richmond to-day," said Kate, whose composure was severely tried by his unexpected appearance, the colour coming up in her pale cheek, and then leaving it paler than before.

"My sister writes to me to go to-morrow instead, so I have run up to see you to-day," returned Galbraith, walking on beside her, his eyes riveted on her face for a few unguarded seconds.

"And I suppose there is no news of my purse?" said Kate, quickly.

"None, I am sorry to say; in fact, I have come to tell you there is nothing to tell." Galbraith twisted his moustaches and smiled as he spoke.

"It is a long way to come for nothing," exclaimed Kate, incautiously, and wished immediately she had not spoken, though Hugh only remarked—

"For nothing—yes."

A few minutes' silence, and they were at

Mrs. Temple's lodging. Galbraith, without waiting for any invitation, followed her in very deliberately.

"Dear, dear, your fire is near out, ma'am," cried the landlady, as she threw open the door of the little front parlour. "I will bring a few sticks and make it burn up in a jiffey."

"Do, Mrs. Small," said Kate, a chill feeling striking through her with a visible shiver. "I am cold and tired."

The landlady lit the gas, and bustled away.

"You look tired and pale," said Galbraith, advancing to the hearth-rug and leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, while he gazed kindly and gravely upon her. "I suppose I ought to leave you?" He spoke with the curious familiarity which had grown up between them.

"You may stay awhile if you like," she returned in the same tone, and urged to the words by a strange reluctance to part with him all at once, without a little more talk, perhaps a last argument. The return of Mrs. Small and the lighting up of the fire were a seasonable diversion; and while the operation was in progress Kate loosened her cloak and took off her bonnet with the easy, graceful na-

turalness that was one of her great charms in Galbraith's eyes, seating herself in her favourite low chair, her hands clasped upon her knee, without once looking in the glass to see if her hair was rough or smooth.

"And you," began Galbraith, drawing a chair opposite—"have you seen this absentee lawyer of yours yet?"

"Yes; I have had a long interview with him to-day."

"Hence these—not tears, but pale cheeks?" said Galbraith.

"No, indeed; my interview was less crushing than I feared."

"That is, you are encouraged to go to law?"

"Almost."

"If it is 'almost' only, take my advice and don't."

"Your advice! You are not much of a lawyer, Sir Hugh."

"Perhaps not." A pause followed.

"Do you know," resumed Galbraith, "it was only a week yesterday since I met you at H——"

"Only a week! It seems a year ago," said Kate dreamily.

"It does," he returned ; "and it seems two or three since I looked up and met your murderous glance the first day you were good enough to write a letter for me at Piers-toffe."

This was dangerous ground, and Kate determined to lead away from it as soon as possible.

"How can you persist in such absurdity ! It was a sickly fancy of yours that I looked murderously at you. Why should I?—you, a stranger I had never seen in my life before."

"It was no fancy, Mrs. Temple ! I shall never forget your look, and I have seen something like it since in your eyes."

"There is no use in arguing with you, I know, on that subject. Pray, do you ever feel any inconvenience from your arm now, Sir Hugh ?"

"No ; it is all right when I do not think of it. But sometimes when I do, I hesitate about using it ;" and he stretched it out and bent it. "And when are you to be released from your solitude here, and restored to your pretty little partner and Mrs. Mills ?"

"I am not perfectly sure yet ; not till I see

the lawyer to-morrow : but soon, I am sure. By-the-way, Sir Hugh, you had better give me the inspector's name and address, that I may send him mine at Pierstoffe, in case he should recover my money."

"I can do that for you. It is just possible he might not like to give you your own except through me."

"Will you do this for me then?"

"I will."

"Are you going to make any stay in town?" she asked next, to break the silence.

"My movements are very uncertain. I find my friend Upton is going into your neighbourhood next week. He is going to stay with Lady Styles, who is some relation of his."

"Oh, indeed!" in a rather dissatisfied tone; "and are you to be of the party?"

"No, I am not invited. I suppose I shall drift away back to the very tumble-down home of my fathers, if no good reason arises for staying in the south."

"And have you given up all idea of going into Parliament?"

"Far from it, but I have postponed that project. Next year I shall think of adding

myself to the 'obstructives,' as I think I heard you once say, Mrs. Temple."

"I hope you will not! I do hope not!" she exclaimed. "You really must look about you and read, and convince yourself that it is a terrible waste of time and strength to attach yourself to the Conservative faction. It is impossible to stand still."

"Is it not rare to meet so decided a democrat as you are, Mrs. Temple, among women?"

"I do not know; and I do not think I am what is generally considered a democrat—that is, I am more disposed to raise up than to pull down."

She spoke carelessly, without the earnestness and animation she usually displayed when discussing any topic that interested her. Galbraith noticed this, and persisted with his subject, fearing that if any long pause ensued he would be compelled to leave her.

"And how far down would you extend your raising system?"

"To any depth where human life exists."

"And then, when all are masters, how would the work of the world go on?"

"Ah, Sir Hugh, you ask that because you

do not take the trouble to think ! Obedience is not the virtue of the ignorant. Who, in all dangerous or difficult expeditions, bears hardship and privation best ? Who is the most subordinate, submitting cheerfully, for the sake of discipline, even to regulations the wisdom of which he doubts ? The cultivated gentleman."

"Yes, that is true enough ; but in ordinary life cultivated gentlemen would not be satisfied with rough labour—ploughing fields and making railways ; and we *must* have hewers of wood and drawers of water."

"By the time all men are wrought up to such a pitch we shall have found some substitute for hard manual labour, which, by-the-way, has nothing in it degrading ; and God knows we are at so great, so enormous a distance from even a decent platform of education and habit—I mean among our lower classes—that the most rigid Tory among you might safely give a helping hand without fearing that a day of disabling cultivation will arrive too soon. But it is always the same. I suppose when slavery began to die out in England the Galbraiths of that day (I suppose there were Galbraiths then) thought

the country was going to the dogs, and that law, order, property, were endangered."

Galbraith smiled.

"Still, if men are raised to a higher state of intelligence and cultivation, they will demand political power, and we know what *that* is in the hands of the multitude."

"Not a cultivated multitude," she replied ; "we have never seen that. I do not think you make sufficient allowance for the natural common sense of Englishmen. Besides, I have a sort of dim notion that political rights are an education in themselves ; a sense of responsibility makes a man think—teaches him self-respect. If a child is for ever in leading-strings he cannot learn to stand alone. The French were in leading-strings all the hundreds of years of their national life, till the supreme moment when, with mature passion but childish intellect, they burst their bonds, and gave Europe a picture awful and horrible enough, but not worse than might have been logically expected."

"You think, then, that we ought to have no political privileges beyond those of our labourers and artisans ?"

"My ideas are crude," said Kate thought-

fully ; " but I do believe that the key to the real position of what is termed the ruling class was given to us more than eighteen hundred and fifty years ago in the sentence, ' Whoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. ' "

" You are quite original, Mrs. Temple ! "

" I wish I could think so, " she said smiling ; " but I don't suppose I ever had an original idea in my life. My highest attainment is to understand other people's ideas. However I have not converted you—I can see that, nor do I expect it ; but I should be pleased if I could persuade you to believe there are two sides to the conservative question. Your opinions are of some importance, mine have none, except to myself. "

" I'm not quite such a pig-headed fellow as you imagine, " returned Galbraith, laughing. " I shall not bind myself hand and foot to any leader ; but, though I do not like to see the people oppressed, as long as I live I shall do my best to keep them in their place. "

" What is their place ? " asked Kate. " Would you go back to the caste system of Egypt ? "

But Galbraith had gained his point. He had drawn her out to talk and smile with

animation and interest; and odious as political women generally, indeed always, were, there was a simple sincerity about Mrs. Temple's opinions that made them not only bearable, but pleasant to listen to. He did not pursue the subject. "You have great facilities for studying politics. I remember you take in lots of newspapers at Pierstoffs. By-the-way, how does Miss Lee get on without you?"

"Very badly, I imagine, which makes me so impatient at being kept so long here; and I miss her much! We are great friends."

"Yes; you gave me that idea. Do you never quarrel?"

"No; do you and—who is your great friend?—Colonel Upton?" Galbraith bent his head. "Do you and Colonel Upton never quarrel?"

"No; but I don't know how it would be if we were shut up in a small room or shop together all day, like Miss Lee and yourself!"

"Well, we are always good friends. To be sure, Fanny gives up to me in everything. I am afraid I am rather imperious."

"I am afraid you are," said Galbraith gravely.

"You cannot possibly know!" she returned in some surprise.

"At any rate," returned Galbraith, "two imperious people never could get on; but when I hear Upton say that no such thing as friendship exists between women (he is a shocking heathen, Mrs. Temple), I always think of you and Miss Lee. He is equally sceptical, I am sorry to say, about friendship between men and women," and Galbraith stole a glance at her as he spoke.

"One doesn't often see it, I am afraid," she said frankly, looking straight into the fire; "and it is such a loss. Women will never be in a right position until hearty, honest friendships with men are of everyday occurrence."

"I am afraid, then, your right position is a long way off. It is all very well to discuss opinions and exchange ideas with an old woman, or an ugly one; but," continued Galbraith, with a mixture of fun and admiration, "when one is talking to a lovely creature, or even a pretty girl, one's thoughts are apt to be distracted by the beautiful eyes that meet your own, or the sweet lips that contradict you!"

"Ah, Sir Hugh," exclaimed Kate, "you

make me understand how it is that plain women have called forth the deepest, truest, highest love! The feeling that is always being influenced by the accident of personal gifts is ignoble and unworthy."

"Perhaps so," returned Galbraith, "but it is uncommonly natural; though I will not allow you to set me down as a devotee of merely physical beauty! I could not care for a beautiful fool. Indeed, I do not believe a fool could be beautiful; but I confess that, with me, friendship for a lovely, companionable woman would very soon warm into love—unless, indeed, I had already given that love to another."

"Is he warning me that he is provided with a safeguard?" was the thought that flashed through her brain as he made a slight pause, and then resumed.

"But in that case I doubt if I should have even friendship to spare." And as he spoke Galbraith leant his folded arms on the table, bending his head towards her with wistful eyes that set her heart beating, and turned her cheek pale with apprehension.

"It is a vexed question," she said coldly. "Let us hope the happy solution may be found

in the future perfection which some think our race will reach."

The severe composure of her tone checked Galbraith. He kept silence for a moment, telling himself he must not spoil his chance by precipitation; and she looked so sad and quiet, and unlike her own frank, fearless self, that a tender dread of disturbing her unnecessarily, held him back. He was learning and developing rapidly in Love's school. Then he would see her again and again—and win his way at last!

Meantime Kate looked at her watch. "I am going to treat you unceremoniously, as an old acquaintance," she said, smiling away the abruptness of her words; "but I have letters to write, and——"

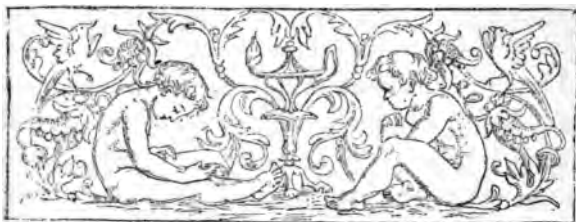
"And I have kept you too long from them," interrupted Galbraith, rising, but not in the least ruffled. "I shall see you to-morrow."

"You are going to Richmond, are you not?"

"True; well, on Sunday, then—and hear when you leave."

"It all depends upon the lawyer," she returned, in a low voice. "Good-bye, Sir Hugh Galbraith."

He took the hand she held out, pressing it close, tighter than he knew, and kept it, still not daring to trust himself to speak. Kate strove to withdraw it, and grew so deadly white, while she compressed her lips with a look of pain, that a sudden sense of coming evil struck him. He relinquished her hand, and with a hasty "Good-bye—God bless you!" turned quickly away.



CHAPTER VI.

KATE was astir early next day, and having settled her landlady's claims, started away to deposit her luggage at the station before calling on Mr. Wall. She also posted a little note for Galbraith,—very short, saying good-bye kindly, decidedly. “But where is the use of my decision?” she reflected. “He is so obstinate, that unless he chooses to give me up of his own accord, he will come down to Pierstoffe again! I trust I have impressed him with the conviction that it is useless to think of me. I would not for any consideration do him an atom more mischief than I can help.” As she thought, how clearly she saw him as he

looked across the table at her the evening before, and felt again the thrill his eyes had sent through her, she was quite glad to reach Mr. Wall's office, that she might get rid of the haunting idea of Hugh Galbraith.

Mr. Wall had nothing different to say from the day before. He was much impressed by the bearing of the evidence he had been studying. Still, the want of some connecting link, the doubt as to whom he should attack, made him hesitate. So the result of Kate's interview with the cautious lawyer was the same as before. Nothing was to be done till after consultation with Mr. Reed.

"By-the-way, Mrs. Travers," said Mr. Wall, as she was about to take leave of him, "I wish you would let me have your version of the quarrel or disagreement between yourself and Mr. Travers, of which Ford, as well as I remember, made a good deal at the time we were discussing this unfortunate will, and its possible cause."

"Did Ford make a good deal of it?" she replied, looking at him earnestly. "It was a trifle, but an unpleasant one. At the time of my old friend and benefactor Mr. Lee's death, I knew that his grand-daughter, my former

playfellow, was left in sore need. I sent her a sum of money, which I could well spare from my ample allowance, but I did not think it necessary to inform my husband. Her letter acknowledging it fell into Mr. Travers' hands, and he was more annoyed than I could have expected. He was ill and querulous. I fear I was not as patient as I ought to have been. He spoke to me as he never spoke before or since—as I would rather not remember. Unfortunately Mr. Ford was waiting in the back drawing-room to see Mr. Travers, while this took place,—not with closed doors, I regret to say. He overheard, and presumed afterwards to remind me of it. That is the whole story, and pray remember, that for nine months after that occurrence I was Mr. Travers' constant, trusted companion. Believe me, Ford has his own object for dwelling on such a trifle."

"Then do you imagine Ford had any hand in substituting this present will for the true one?"

"I do, and I imagine the date of the will has been altered to coincide with the quarrel."

"Very extraordinary, very! A rather groundless suspicion, it seems to me. Why do you suspect him?"

"Because I think he wished to injure me?"

"Injure you! I never saw a man more indignant than he was at the injustice done you!"

"Well, Mr. Wall, you must hear Tom Reed on that subject; you will accept his opinion more readily than mine."

"I think I always respect your opinion. But you have not told me everything about the quarrel? It is so hard sometimes to get hold of real facts."

"Do you imagine I pervert them?" asked Kate, as she held out her hand to say good-bye.

"No, no," returned the lawyer, taking it cordially. He was always won over to her by a personal interview, although in her absence the old indignation and wrath against her, for having fooled his friend and client, would assert itself. "I have your address, but I confess it goes against me to write to you under your false name——"

Home, if one's abiding place deserves that name, is very sweet. Warm and tender was the welcome which awaited Mrs. Temple (the

name seemed quite natural to her when she reached Pierstoffs). It was closing-time when she arrived; and as she had kept up the fiction even to herself, that Mr. Wall might have changed his mind, and asked her to remain in town, she had not written to announce her return.

When, therefore, she opened the parlour-door, Fanny gave a small shriek of joy and surprise, darting forward to hug her heartily; then Mills came in, full of motherly thought for her probable needs of food and rest and warmth, as the weather was damp and raw. Kate felt all the power that springs from our social instincts—the strength and wisdom and self-control, and all goodness to which love and sympathy help us. She felt she could face her destiny, whatever it might be, with double, nay treble courage and constancy, here in her fortress of home, and hearts dependent on her, than she could in the solitude of London, where her one companion was becoming too necessary.

“Oh, Kate, dear! How delightful to have you back again! I felt so wretched when there was no letter from you this morning. I fancied all sorts of things except your coming

back. I am sure you have been worried to death. I declare you look quite pale and thin."

"I have been worried, Fan."

"Now here is some nice buttered toast ; you must be perfectly dying for a cup of tea ! When you have taken it, you must begin at the beginning and tell me everything. I never knew anything half so extraordinary and romantic as your meeting Hugh Galbraith. Have you had any news of the purse ? No ! I am afraid it is gone ! And what did Mr. Wall say ? I never liked him, he is such a stiff old thing. Oh, by-the-way, I had such a nice long letter from Tom ; it came by the midday delivery. He hopes to be in London on Wednesday morning, but he will be so busy that he fears he cannot come down for a week to see me—I mean us. And, do you know, he comes back chief editor."

"I suppose so ; and wants to install a commander-in-chief as soon as possible. Eh, Fanny ?"

"Oh, he must not be in a hurry," saucily.
"And, Kate, do you know, I had a visit from that dreadful man to-day !"

"Is it possible !"

"Yes. I felt frightened to death ; but I sha'n't mind now you are here. I was dusting the shelves about ten o'clock, when I heard the door bell ring violently, as if the door had been pushed open with great force, and when I turned round there was my gentleman, looking a shade more horrible than before !"

"How curious ! What did he say ?"

"Oh, he asked me how I was, and said I looked as lovely as the flowers in May. Then he laughed so impudently, and said, 'Is the missis at home ?' And I said, very dignified, 'Do you mean Mrs. Temple ?' 'Exactly, precisely ; Mrs. Temple ?' he said, in a sort of mocking tone. 'Well, she is away at present.' Then he asked when you would be back, and I said, 'I really could not tell.' He seemed very anxious about that, and said at last, 'Do you think she will be back next week ?' And I said 'I thought you would.' And then he took off his hat, and desired his compliments to Mrs. Temple. I fancied he put a sort of emphasis on your name."

"You think he did, Fan ! Depend upon it, then, he knows me. Perhaps he wants me to give him money ? I shall not do that. If any difficulty arises about my identity, I shall

drop my disguise. Yet I want to win my cause first. I want to share with Hugh Galbraith before he knows he is under any obligation to his landlady."

"Poor Sir Hugh! Did you see him again—I mean after you met him at H——?"

"Oh yes, he came several times about my purse."

Fanny put her head on one side, and looked a little mischievous; but she did not like to worry Kate just on her return home, especially as she looked depressed and weary. So, with praiseworthy self-control, she kept silence for a few minutes, hoping that Kate might unfold some more of her London adventures. And after the revivifying effect of a cup of tea she did—that chapter at least which related to her interview with Mr. Wall. But Fanny listened in vain for any further scraps of information about Hugh Galbraith. Kate named him no more.

"What an unsatisfactory old wretch Mr. Wall is, to be sure!" said Fanny meditatively, when Kate had finished her recital. "I dare-say he will create all sorts of difficulties, just to make out that he is very clever to get over them."

“My success or failure does not depend on Mr. Wall,” said Kate, pushing away her cup. “I see myself how imperfect my case looks without some distinct evidence to fill up the hiatus. I do hope that man Trapes will reappear. I cannot help imagining that he has something to do with Ford, and can give me the information we want.”

Mrs. Temple settled herself quickly to her ordinary routine, and was to all appearance more absorbed than ever in her business. For the various neighbours and customers who dropped in to welcome her return, she had a pleasant word of greeting—a bright, pointed answer. She bore the brunt of a heavy charge from Lady Styles, in line, as it were, that is unprepared, and foiled her ladyship with charming frankness and beautiful good breeding.

“Well,” said Lady Styles, towards the end of the encounter, “I am very glad you are back. You always know exactly what one wants; not that I have any complaint to make of this young lady—you are all ladies now, you know. She is very attentive, and all that sort of thing; but there is no one like

Mrs. Temple. Ha, ha, ha! I wonder if you will turn out a countess in disguise, my dear!"

"I am afraid not, even to oblige you, Lady Styles."

"What has become of that agreeable young man I had tea with—ha, ha, ha, ha!—the evening Sir Hugh Galbraith's leg was broken?"

"He is in London as usual, I suppose."

"Suppose! Ah, my dear, that won't do. I suppose one or other of you hear from him every day? Which is it?"

"Both," returned Kate, smiling. "He manages all our business, and that necessitates frequent correspondence."

"And has Sir Hugh never made his appearance since?"

"I do not think he ever visits Pierstoffe."

"Well, so much the better," nodding her head knowingly. "He was not at all a proper sort of inmate for a handsome young woman like you. You are well rid of him. To be sure, he is not a scamp like his friend, my cousin Upton. He is such a stiff, stand-off sort of creature. I suppose he wouldn't deign to have the weaknesses of other men."

But though Willie Upton is a ‘*vaurien*,’ he is such a pleasant fellow, always good-humoured, always full of fun, that I am inclined to give him plenary absolution. I hope he will get longer leave, and come down to me next week. He is such a help when the house is full. But he is up in town with his chum, Sir Hugh; and I think he wants me to ask him, but I will *not*. I consider that man Galbraith behaved most rudely to me. He refused every invitation I sent him; and when I took the trouble of going upstairs here, to ask how he was getting on, he was as glum and taciturn as—oh, as I don’t know what.”

“Very rude, indeed,” echoed Mrs. Temple, sympathisingly.

“I want two skeins of floss-silk and half an ounce of wool to finish grounding that banner-screen I bought here last spring. There, my dear, match that yellow and green for me. Do you know, Mrs. Temple, your prices are very high? Lady Eccleston was spending a few days with us (Lord Eccleston is that great Welsh mine-owner—doesn’t know the end of his wealth, they say; his grandfather drove black bullocks—you know those long-horned, wild-looking crea-

tures—to the market-town, and never was married, but they don't mind that in Wales); well, Lady Eccleston was telling me there is a shop somewhere in a street near Holborn where she can get a lovely pattern and the wools to work it, for five-and-ninepence or five-and-ninepence-halfpenny. Now, *you* would charge eight or nine shillings."

"I should like to see the pattern and the wools," said Mrs. Temple.

"Ha, ha, ha! very fair," &c., &c., &c.

Doctor Slade, too, came to welcome the fair widow back.

"Seemed quite unnatural not to see your face in the shop as I passed by, though you have not lost much by being away; bad weather banished the visitors earlier than usual. There has been a tremendous blow-up at the Turners'. The old man has been very dissatisfied with the elegant Mr. Joseph. He has been away and unaccounted for on several occasions; but about ten days ago a very fishy-looking individual—a sort of betting-man—swaggered into the shop, half-drunk, wanting Turner, junior; swore he owed him money, and struck the

old man when he attempted to put him out ! There's been the devil to pay, I can tell you. Poor Mrs. Turner had a nervous attack through it, and young hopeful has never come back, but I believe they know where he is."

This and much more gossip did the Doctor communicate, and then observed that Mrs. Temple did not look the better for her trip to town—offered to prescribe for her, and, on being smilingly refused, took his shirt-frill, his ruddy, black-eyed physiognomy, his formidable white teeth, and long, lank self away.

"Why, Fanny dear, this unfortunate young Turner has evidently been Trape's attraction, and in some mysterious way he has recognised you !" exclaimed Mrs. Temple, as soon as they were alone. "The plot is thickening. I feel so anxious about that man, anxious to see him, and yet fearful."

But though Kate thus upheld herself with courage and composure, her heart behaved itself very differently. The strained feeling of expectation and unrest drove sleep from her pillow, and her ordinary appetite from her meals.

She felt the deepest anxiety to know what line of conduct Mr. Wall and Tom would decide upon after their consultation. A few lines from the latter had announced his return, but no more. Then she felt surprised, and although she did not admit it even to herself, disappointed that Galbraith had taken no notice of her sudden departure, or her little note. It was quite wise and proper of him not to write (unless, indeed, he had any tidings of her lost purse), but it was not exactly the style of wisdom she should have expected from him. It was not to be wondered at, of course, considering the struggle pending between them, that Galbraith should be constantly in her thoughts, but it sometimes troubled her to find how her memory was haunted by his voice, which, though deep and harsh, was far from inexpressive; by his eyes, which she wondered she had ever thought sombre and stern; by his tall, gaunt, but not undignified figure. How much he had improved since he had been carried into her house, looking like death—and, above all, how fond he was of her! This crowning merit she was compelled to acknowledge, and yet she scarcely knew the power it gave him over

herself. To be loved, heartily, honestly loved by a man in whose mind is no wavering or irresolution or calculation is, to a woman of Kate Travers's calibre, almost irresistible, provided the lover is personally presentable, and not beneath her in character. Grateful and loving by nature, she could not undervalue a gift because it was cast unreservedly at her feet, as other and lower-class women would and do. At first she had been startled and offended at the abrupt, and she considered presumptuous, manner in which Galbraith had asked her to be his wife ; but the way he had borne her refusal had touched a sympathetic chord in her heart, and now their long, friendly conversations during her London loneliness had shown her there was more stuff in her enemy than she had given him credit for. He was not a cultivated nor an intellectual man, but he was prompt to see his way in whatever direction he wanted to go ; resolute in purpose, with a controlled fire under his cold exterior, that threatened not to be quite so easily managed as she once imagined. Then he was so straightforward ! It made her heart throb to think how he would receive the intelligence that she had to a certain extent

played him false, and won his love while she was preparing to win his fortune too !

What would he think of her ? If he despised her, good-bye to love from him ! And though she did not wish to win it, how should she like to lose his love ? Would she ever find anything like it again ?—so true, so regardless of circumstances—the most objectionable that could be imagined to a man brimful of class prejudices as Hugh Galbraith was—and how was she going to reward his affection ! Would he permit her to act Providence to him, and restore with one hand what she took with the other ? “He must—he shall !” was generally the conclusion of her reverie.

But this constant struggle in her heart wore her spirits, and a secret belief that Galbraith would suddenly appear, kept her on the alert. Still a sort of gentle humility, not always natural to her—a sort of doubt as to the wisdom and rectitude of her own conduct—made her most patient and forbearing. Nevertheless, Fanny’s true heart, unerring in its instincts, saw that she was very unlike herself ; and when, at last, about ten days after her return, Kate received Tom’s long-expected report, Fanny was shocked to see how pale

she turned, and how her hand shook as she opened the letter.

The information contained in it was to the following effect: Tom Reed had seen Mr. Wall immediately on his reaching London, and had arranged a meeting with him and Captain Gregory (who was sufficiently recovered to travel); they together visited Doctors' Commons, taking with them the two signatures for comparison, and accompanied by the expert. The result of a careful examination was that they considered Gregory's signature false, Mr. Travers' doubtful, but all agreed with C—— (the expert) that Poole's was genuine. "This," continued Reed's epistle, "is not at all what either Mr. Wall or myself anticipated; however, we have agreed to take an opinion on the case, and will be guided by it. I have fortunately found out a man who remembers seeing Trapes at the Reephram steeplechase on the date we want to prove, and also remembers that he was with another, who answers to Poole's description. I must get this fellow (he is an occasional sporting correspondent) to go and see Poole on some pretext, although I cannot believe that Poole knowingly signed a forged will.

Time will show, and we must collect all possible evidence; for however morally sure these small indications may make *us*, they are far from being proof positive.

"I shall endeavour, if possible, to run down and see you next Saturday, by which time we may know what course counsel recommends."

"It will be a long uncertainty, I am afraid," said Kate with a sigh—a quivering, anxious sigh—to Fanny, who had read the letter over her shoulder. I only desire that, for or against me, it may be soon decided."

"Oh, you must not think of 'against,'" said Fanny, kissing her brow affectionately. "It never can go against any one so kind and generous and gentle as you are. I really should feel ever so much happier if you would be just a little cross and unreasonable—just to relieve your heart, {you know! It's inhuman to be so quiet and—and like an angel, when I know you feel miserable and broken-hearted. The tears stood in Fanny's eyes as she spoke. "I know you do," she repeated; "I have seen you angry and sad, but never quite like you are now."

"*Resurgam!*" cried Kate, laughing and

returning her kiss. "I will do my best to be disagreeable, if that is any comfort to you. I am rather downhearted just now, but it will pass away, and I shall be myself again."



CHAPTER VII.

THE day after she had received Tom's letter, Kate's nervous depression culminated in an intense, disabling headache. She bore up against it bravely all the morning ; but after their early dinner she could endure the shop no longer.

"I think the air might do me good," said she to Fanny. "I will ask Mills to give me a cup of strong tea, and then I will creep along the beach, and perhaps rest awhile under the broken cliff. It is as bright and almost as warm as summer."

"Do so, dear," replied Fanny. "It is the best thing for your head, and I feel quite independent of your help in the shop, quite

self-reliant ; equal to setting up an opposition over the way."

It was a St. Martin's summer's day, one of those brief smiles which the departing season sometimes turns to throw back to us before she is quite gone. The morning had been thick, but towards noon the mist had rolled nearly away, leaving a silvery haze out to sea, under which the water lay blue and still, just stirred with a sleepy ripple, and thinly edged with white where it lapped the shore as the tide stole in. Little birds twittered among the brambles and bushes of the North Cliff, and the click of the capstan came with a mellow ring across the water from a coal brig, which looked fairy-like through the faint mist, where the crew were heaving the anchor. "This is reviving," thought Kate, thankfully inhaling the briny air as she passed the North Parade houses, and leaving the path to the coast-guard's landing-place on the left, kept along the beach to where a mass of fragments had fallen from the cliff above and scattered themselves over the sand. There was a slight indentation in the shore just here, so that many of the fallen rocks were never washed by the sea, even at high-water, and were,

therefore, more or less covered with a growth of weeds and briars, but the smaller pieces had rolled further seaward. Advancing to where the 'wavelets were stealing up with a soft, caressing murmur, Kate stood awhile to enjoy the peaceful beauty of sea and sky, then retreating a few paces, seated herself on a small piece of rock apparently broken from a larger neighbour close to which it lay. She drew forth a number of 'Household Words' she had caught up as she left the house, hoping by its help to avoid dwelling fruitlessly on the problem of her own affairs.

But her thoughts were wandering and rebellious: they would not occupy themselves with the page before her, but kept darting away to irrelevant topics, presenting dioramas of old scenes,—her home at Cullingford, the German school where she had passed some busy, happy, materially uncomfortable days; her husband's death-bed—this came back very vividly.

She had not sat long thus thinking or dreaming, when she fancied she heard something like a step, an unsteady step, stumbling among the shingle which here and there lay over the smooth sand. She did not heed it

at first, concluding it was some boy hunting for winkles, or one of the fishermen, most of whom were known to her. But the step approached. With a sudden feeling of apprehension she turned to look, and beheld a man of middle height, with a red nose, and small, fierce, red-rimmed eyes, a hat not worn out, but though new, visibly bent in at one side ; a sort of green shooting-coat, and leggings buttoned to the knee, but buttoned awry ; a short stick in his hand, and a short pipe in his mouth, completed his very disreputable appearance. Moreover, to her dismay, Kate observed an unsteadiness about his knees, a look of severe wisdom in his once tolerable-looking face.

“ Good heavens ! ” she said in her heart.
“ It must be Trapes, and he is tipsy ! ”

The next moment he raised his battered hat with an attempt at high-bred style, and said, “ I think I have the honour of speaking to Mrs. Travers ? ” advancing disagreeably close.

“ My name is Temple,” she returned coldly, but keeping a brave front.

“ Oh, Temple, is it ! ” with a burst of insolent laughter. Then suddenly changing to

profound gravity, he took his pipe out of his mouth, and waving it in the air gracefully, repeated, " Temple, — quite right in one sense ! Temple is the correct thing—shrine—what you call 'em for a beautiful goddess, eh ?"

Another sudden peal of laughter, as suddenly turned into stern gravity.

" Now, then, Mrs. Temple Travers, compliments being passed, let us proceed to business—I say business ! Let's sit down ;" and, suiting the action to the word, he took the seat Mrs. Temple had just quitted. " Sit down, won't you, and we can talk comfortably—lots of room," he continued, drawing so close to the edge of the piece of rock that he nearly toppled over.

Kate, dreadfully puzzled what to do or say, frightened at his condition, yet not liking to lose the chance of discovering what was the mysterious link, if any, between him and Ford, said, as civilly and composedly as she could, " Thank you, I have been sitting for some time, and prefer standing now."

" Oh, well, please yourself, Mrs. Travers Temple. You see I do not like to contradict

a lady, but the last time I saw you, you were Mrs. Travers. Yes, you were."

"Where have you seen me?" asked Kate graciously.

"At Hampton Court, with a young fellow called Reed. Do you know Tom Reed?"

"I do," returned Kate at once, seeing that the man really recognised her.

"He is a blackguard—a great blackguard!" returned Trapes, with solemn disapprobation.

"I was like a father to that young man, Mrs. Temple Travers, like a father, 'pon my life! When he was first up in town, and one of the biggest greenhorns you ever came across; and now——" Trapes shook his head in silence, and replacing the pipe in his mouth, essayed to smoke, but in vain. "My pipe's out," said he, again waving it before him. "A common expression, you'll observe, but there is a good deal of pathos in it for all that. My pipe's out! I've drawn too hard and quick, and the 'baccy is gone, and nothing is left but the scent of the weed, which hangs round it still; so with life—my life—but," with sudden energy, "this is wandering from the point. As I was saying, I was the making of that fellow Reed. He hasn't an idea he

did not filch from me. 'Who steals my purse steals trash,' eh? Well, would he lend me a fi-pun' note now, as between two gentlemen? No, not to save my life! And that brings me to my point again. Will you, madam, have the goodness to *give* me five pounds? for I wish to be perfectly correct in all my dealings, and it is not my intention to return it." He lifted his hat as he said this, and replaced it, considerably on one side, with a defiant air. Kate looked earnestly at him, trying to find out how far she might venture to speak rationally. He was not so very drunk after all. She would see on what he founded his claim for five pounds.

"And why should I give you money?" she said smiling; "though you say you know me, I certainly do not know you. Why should I give you five pounds?"

"For value to be received," he returned. "For, 'pon my soul, if you trust me to that extent," an attempt at refinement of tone sadly marred by a drunken wink, "you shall receive cent. per cent., or rather four or five hundred per cent. on the capital advanced."

"Of course I should be very pleased to secure such a splendid return for so small an

outlay," said Kate pleasantly. "Tell me a little more about it."

"Ah, ha! Mrs. Temple, or Travers, or whatever you choose to call yourself, you are deep—deuced deep—but it won't do! I'll not let you pump me, and leave me high and dry afterwards. No, no; you must have faith, madam! Look here, now. It's a d——d shame to see a woman like you behind a beggarly counter, cheated out of your own, and all by a dirty trick! Now suppose I——"

Kate listened with the utmost avidity, seeing which, Trapes, with drunken cunning, broke off suddenly, and burst into a rude boisterous laugh. "No, no," he repeated, "that would be telling."

"Well, you must remember that, right or wrong, I am a poor woman now, and five pounds is a large sum. I might not hesitate if I knew what I am to give it for."

"If you are poor, I am sorry for you. I feel for you from the bottom of this blighted heart." Trapes' eyes filled, and almost overflowed with emotion. "Then, hark in your ear! as the stage fellows say. I can set wrong right! on my honour as a gentleman."

"Then," replied Kate, her heart beating, burning to hear more, yet not liking to talk longer with him in his present condition, "come to my house this evening, and we can discuss matters. You will find me neither unjust nor illiberal. You know where I live." She bent her head to him, and moved away.

"Stop a bit," cried Trapes, starting up and placing himself so as to cut off her retreat. "My dear creature, I am exceedingly sorry to be so pressing, but I haven't a rap; not a rap, 'pon my soul; not even a screw of 'baccy! I must have a half-sov., a few shillings to keep me going till to-night, when I hope the supply is 'to be continued,' like Tom Reed's trash. I am growing deuced hungry, and they won't give me a crust without the rhino in that cursed hole of an inn. Come now, five bob won't break you!"

Kate, moved by a mixture of pity and disgust, put her hand in her pocket. To her regret and dismay—for Trapes' red-rimmed eyes were beginning to look vicious—there was no purse there. She must have left it in her morning-dress.

"I am really very sorry, but I have not

my purse. I would willingly give you a few shillings indeed, if I had."

"Now," said Trapes savagely, and throwing away his pipe, "that is as shabby a bit of humbug as ever I heard; and what is more, I shall take the liberty of rummaging your pocket myself, and if the purse isn't there you shall pay forfeit in kisses, — if you shan't."

"Sir," exclaimed Kate, horribly frightened yet striving to seem composed, "this insolent folly will do you no good. If you will have patience——"

But he had already seized her wrists; his dreadful satyr face was close to hers, when to her joy, her relief, Kate, who was looking towards the cliff, saw a figure moving from behind one of the largest fragments of rock that lay near, a figure whose gait and bearing she knew well. She was safe now.

"Hugh!" she screamed, "dear Hugh, come to me!"

He was upon Trapes in an instant. Seizing his collar, he wrenched him away with such force that the half-drunken wretch fell at once to the ground.

"What is it?" asked Galbraith, placing

himself between Kate and her assailant. "Robbery—what?"

"I am no more a robber than you are," said Trapes, sullenly, as somewhat sobered he gathered himself up from the ground. Galbraith's hand was on his collar again directly. "Let me alone, I say," continued Trapes, trying in vain to shake it off; "I meant no harm, it was only a bit of a joke," and he struggled hard to free himself from Galbraith's grasp, but in vain.

"You will find it no joke, you dog! I shall march you back to the police station."

"Oh, Hugh, don't hurt him! He is weak, perhaps he is hungry. I do not think he knows what he is doing! Don't hurt him!"

"Let me go," said Trapes in an altered voice, touched by the genuine pity of Kate's tones. "The lady is right! I am sorry, and ashamed I frightened her."

"Let him go," whispered Kate, and Galbraith, puzzled, but by no means reluctant to be rid of him and alone with her, released his hold.

"Take care what you do," he said sternly. "If I find you prowling about here, I shall warn the police against you."

Trapes slowly and sullenly withdrew, muttering to himself.

"You are frightened," said Galbraith, taking Kate's hand and drawing it through his arm, where in the confusion of the moment she let it remain; "you are trembling all over. Tell me, what did that brute want?"

Kate could not quite command her voice. She felt utterly in Galbraith's hands for the moment; and if she let the tears which were ready to come, and would have relieved her, burst forth, she feared the effect they might have on her companion.

"Sit down and recover yourself before you speak," said Galbraith, with infinite gentleness, and he led her to the place from which Trapes had disturbed her. Moving a little apart, he leaned against an angle of the rock close by, while Kate, trying to smile, with white, quivering lips, looked up at him and said as steadily as she could,

"He said he was very badly off and wanted a few shillings, and when I put my hand in my pocket I found I had not my purse; so he would not believe me, and wanted to examine my pocket himself. He was not sober. He did not, I think, intend to rob me."

"It looked very like it ; yet he certainly did not seem a common tramp. I think it is my duty to make the police look after him."

"Perhaps so. I will probably lodge a complaint against him myself."

"You should do so without fail, Mrs. Temple ! Are you feeling all right again ?"

"Nearly," she said, passing her hand over her brow. In truth, she was much more upset by Galbraith's sudden appearance than by her adventure with Trapes, besides a natural embarrassment at being alone with him under such circumstances ; his presence, just when she had found perhaps the missing link of evidence, was most inopportune. Nevertheless, come what might, she could not help feeling a strange, unreasonable thrill of pleasure at finding him there beside her—caring for her. "But tell me, how is it that you are here just at the right moment ?" she continued.

"When I went down to my sister the day after I last saw you in London," returned Galbraith, "I found that she had had a quarrel with her husband ; that he was in a scrape, and gone off she did not know where. I was obliged to go in search of him, so I

wrote an explanatory note to you, which of course you never received. I had a good deal of running about after Harcourt, and I did not go to my club till yesterday morning. There I found your very unsatisfactory epistle. It was rather shabby of you to give me the slip in that way, so I took the train to Stoneborough yesterday afternoon, and came on here this morning—called at the Bazaar, was graciously received by Miss Lee, who told me you had gone with a book and a headache to sit on the rocks under the broken cliff. I just came up in the nick of time. Drunk or sober, that fellow must be punished. You are trembling still.” As he spoke, Galbraith sat down beside her, taking one of her hands in both of his, very gently, yet he held it close.

“You are always good to me, and I don’t deserve it,” said Kate, unable to hold the reins of her self-control with her usual steadiness, her voice faltering while she tried to draw away her hand, not very resolutely; “I don’t indeed, Sir Hugh.”

“Perhaps not,” he said, gazing at her; “but you see it is not so much what you deserve as what I cannot help giving. I can

no more help loving you than I help breathing! Well, there," releasing her hand, "I will not keep it if you don't like. You know that I cannot live without you—no, that's nonsense! I shall have to live without you, if such is your will. But are you *quite* sure it *is* your will? Come, Kate, you must hear all I have to say. You have made me so miserable and unlike myself, I think I have a right to be heard."

"It would be so much better not," she said with trembling lips. She was frightened and bewildered, but the tame and somewhat gloomy tenor of her life had never known such a moment of delicious pain before.

"No, it is better we should understand each other." He leant forward, his arm on his knee supporting his head on his hand that he might look into her eyes. "I have done my best to forget you, and you, for some reason or other, have done your best to choke me off; but it won't do. You will perhaps think me a conceited idiot, but I can't help fancying you like me better than you think. I cannot get the sound of your voice just now out of my ears when you called me 'Hugh! dear Hugh.'

I would give some years of my life to hear you say so again in earnest. Couldn't you try?" and Galbraith smiled entreatingly as he spoke.

"It was the terror of the moment," said Kate, very low. "I did not know what I said."

"Ay, but you have called me 'Hugh' before, when there was nothing to frighten or disturb you! Tell me, have I no chance with you? Why will you not be my wife? I am a rugged sort of fellow, I know, but there should be no ruggedness in your life, dear—all the best I have should be yours," and he again took her hand.

"Oh, don't talk to me like that," cried Kate, snatching it away and covering her face; "I must not let you. It is quite impossible you could marry me. If you knew everything you would see that I am the last woman you would like to marry."

"My God!" exclaimed Galbraith, the colour leaving his face. "Is it possible there is any real barrier between us? Is it possible there can be any spot in your past life that you would wish to hide?"

"Do you mean that I have done anything

wrong?" returned Kate, her face still hidden, her voice faltering, and keeping back her tears only by a determined effort. "No, there is nothing in my past life I need blush for. It is not my fault that there is any barrier—I mean that there are things—circumstances you would not like——!"

She stopped abruptly.

"Is your husband really dead?" asked Galbraith sternly, Lady Styles's gossip recurring to his mind.

"He is, indeed!" said Kate, recovering herself in some degree. "I am not quite such an impostor as you imagine. But, Sir Hugh, you are putting yourself and me to unnecessary pain, for I am most deeply grieved to be compelled to pain you! I acknowledge there is a secret in my past; and, besides, I do not—I never entertained the idea of loving you—I really do not think I do—at any rate——." She quite believed she was speaking the truth.

"I suppose I must submit to be again rejected!" he interrupted, very bitterly. "I daresay you deserve a better man than I am; but, such as I am, I could be satisfied with nothing short of your whole heart. I have

heard of fellows being content to wait and win a woman's affection inch by inch; but I could not stand that. I love you so passionately, that if you were my wife, and I had a doubt that you were not fully, freely, utterly my own, why, I should go mad with despair and jealousy!"

He rose as he spoke, and walked away a pace or two; then returning, looking grim and stern enough, he resumed his seat by Kate, who, deeply moved by his words, but nerved to desperate self-command by a sudden sense of the effect they produced upon herself, turned to him, her long lashes gemmed with tears, her eyes soft with the most tender sympathy. "Do not fear, you will be well loved yet by some one more fitted to be your wife than I am!"

"That is like giving me a stone when I ask for bread," said Galbraith. "Turn to me now, put your hand in mine, and if you can say it with truth, say, 'Hugh Galbraith, I love you;' say it with your eyes, that tell so much! as well as your lips, and, by Heaven! I will forget and forgive your past, *whatever* is in it—there! I never thought I should say as much to any woman."

He held out his hand, and there was a moment's silence.

"I must not, Hugh!" replied Kate, with a deep, quivering sigh. "Nor do I need to have my past either forgiven or forgotten!"

"Then why make a mystery of it? Mysteries always imply something to be ashamed of."

"I will tell you everything one day," exclaimed Kate, stung by his tone, and taking a sudden resolution, "if you still care to hear my story."

"Ay, but when?" cried Galbraith, with animation.

"Before five months from this time."

"That is a long way off!"

"I may be able to do so sooner," replied Kate, rising; "and, meantime, do—do forgive me for causing you much discomfort. God knows I am wretched myself! and try to put me out of your head. I fear—that is, I think—that when you do know everything you will not wish—in short, do not trouble yourself about me. Go away among your friends, and you will see far more charming women, and more suitable." She stopped, for words and voice failed her.

"I will," said Galbraith shortly. "I don't like mysteries, and I think you might trust me now. Still, I will claim your promise. Can you not make it three months?"

"No, I cannot. And now I must say good-bye. I must not stay here any longer."

"I will not allow you to go alone. I must insist on your taking my arm—that scoundrel may be lurking about. I will go with you, at any rate, as far as the houses. You must let me take care of you so far, Kate. I will not intrude my feelings on you any more. You may trust me. You have said 'No,' often enough."

It was a trying and embarrassing progress—Kate's arm held closely within Galbraith's. He guided her steps with the most watchful care, but in almost unbroken silence, save for an occasional inquiry, "Am I going too fast?" "Would you like to stop?" Fortunately the distance to the first houses of the North Parade was but short. Here Kate resolutely withdrew her arm. "I feel quite steady now, and can go on alone." He made no attempt to dissuade her, but held out his hand. Kate placed hers in it, frankly, impulsively, and

raising her eyes, met his—a long look ; then Galbraith said, “ It must be good-bye, then ? ”

“ It must, Sir Hugh ; ” spoken sadly.

“ And you promise to reveal the mystery ? ”

“ Yes, if you ask.”

“ And then—— ”

“ Leave the future to the ‘ Providence that shapes our ends.’ ”

“ Am I forbidden to visit Pierstoffs ? ”

“ Yes,—at any rate the Berlin Bazaar—for four or five months ; then, if your interest and curiosity are not diverted into other channels, you may write and ask the fulfilment of my promise.”

“ Kate,” said Galbraith, sinking his voice to its deepest tones, while he raised the hand that still lay in his to his lips, “ it is not all over with me yet ? ”

“ Do not let yourself think so,” she replied earnestly ; and turning from him, walked quickly towards the town. Galbraith stood still, gazing after her in deep thought till she had got well ahead, and then slowly followed.



CHAPTER VIII.

DID you meet Sir Hugh?" was Fanny's first question, when, after her day's work was over, she went up to her friend's room to see if that horrible headache was any better.

Kate had availed herself of that excuse to keep out of sight and in semi-darkness till her nerves had somewhat quieted down after the painful, pleasurable, overwhelming excitement she had gone through.

"Yes, Fan, I met him; and who else, do you think?"

"I can't think. Not Tom?"

"No, indeed; but that dreadful creature Trapes!"

"Trape!" with a little scream. "And what did he say?"

"Nothing I can depend upon. He was rather—indeed, very tipsy; and among other things he offered to restore me to my rights, but wanted me to give him five pounds."

"Well, then?"

"Oh, he would have been content with an instalment of five shillings, but unfortunately I had not my purse about me. Then he grew insolent, and wanted to examine my pocket himself; then Hugh Galbraith came and knocked him down."

"You don't say so! Why, dear Kate, it is just like a play; and I *do* hope that you have promised to marry Sir Hugh. He came in about half an hour after you went out; looking—oh, I never saw him look so well or so bright!—quite handsome; and so pleasant! If it was not for Tom, I should not mind marrying him myself."

Instead of replying, Fanny felt her friend's hand clasp hers with a tremulous pressure.

"Do not talk of Hugh Galbraith just now," she said after a minute's silence. "I will by—

and-by. At present I am greatly troubled about Trapes ; he has disappeared, and I have no idea where to find him. Even if I did, he is such a disreputable creature to inquire about."

She paused.

"Oh, we must find him!" cried Fanny. "What matter about his disreputableness? He would not be at such a grand hotel as the *Marine*; but there is the *Marquis of Cornwallis*, and the *Shakespeare Tavern*. Had I not better catch Jimmy before he goes, and send round to ask?"

Jimmy was the errand boy, and Fanny's most devoted slave.

"No, that will not do. I wish I knew if Hugh Galbraith has actually gone," said Kate thoughtfully.

"Gone!" echoed Fanny in dismay. "Then you have refused him, after all? I think you are very ill-natured. Why don't you make up your minds, and share the property? and we might shut up shop and all be married on the same day!"

"Dear Fanny, you do not know what you are talking about. There, you are putting the *eau de Cologne* in my eyes and making

them smart." For Fanny was treating her friend for severe headache to the best of her skill. "My head is better, and I will not lie here any longer. I must write to Tom by to-night's post. He said he was coming on Saturday; I will beg him on no account to fail me. I cannot do anything without Tom. I seem quite dazed and stupid."

She had risen while she spoke, and was standing before the glass, impatiently shaking back her long chestnut-brown hair preparatory to re-arranging it. Fanny, who was always a little frightened when, to use her own expression, Mrs. Temple got into "a state"—it was so rare—held the candle obsequiously. "You look dreadfully ill, dear," she said soothingly; "had you not better take off your things and go regularly to bed, instead of twisting up your hair and trying to do impossibilities? and I will bring you a nice cup of tea and a muffin —"

"I believe, Fanny, you consider tea and muffins a cure for every earthly ill," interrupted Mrs. Temple, continuing her hair-dressing rapidly and deftly. "The sight of a muffin would make me sick. I want to be up and doing. Don't mind me if I seem cross.

I don't intend to be, but I feel chained here while I ought to be rushing hither and thither to secure Trapes, and urge on Mr. Wall; time is so precious, and it seems impossible to hurry things; just like those dreadful dreams where life depends on speed, and yet one's limbs are lead-weighted and rigid."

"I would not fret myself so dreadfully," said Fanny, in a tone of strong common sense.

"If that horrid man is so very much in want of money as to try to rob you, depend upon it he will come here to ask for some."

"He will probably be ashamed to see me."

"Poor creature, I fancy he has forgotten all about shame."

"Come downstairs, then, Fanny. I am ready, and I shall be glad to be near the fire, I feel so shivery. How I wish Tom were here!"

"So do I," returned Fanny, with cordial acquiescence.

It was considerably past seven when the friends established themselves in their cosy parlour—Fanny stirring the fire into a brilliant condition, sweeping up the hearth, and making all things orderly.

Mrs. Temple at once sat down to write to

Tom, her heart still throbbing at the recollection of Galbraith's words and tone and looks. Her letter was very short : an exhortation to come without fail on Saturday, an announcement of Trapes's momentary appearance, but no word of Hugh. "If I mention him, I must tell everything, and that is quite impossible. It would be bad enough to tell Fanny, but Tom is out of the question."

Fanny had just returned from delivering this epistle into the hands of Sarah, to be posted on her way home, when a low, cautious ring of the front-door bell was heard. Mrs. Temple and Fanny both started. Rings at the front-door bell were rare at that hour, and this was a stealthy, equivocal ring, suggestive of the door-chain and careful reconnoitring.

"Who can it be?" exclaimed Fanny, stopping short in her approach to the fire.

"Tell Mills to be sure and put on the chain," said Kate.

"I will go too," said Fanny, with heroic courage. She did so, but considerably behind the valiant Mills, who, candle in hand, advanced to face the enemy. A short colloquy ensued, and Fanny darted into the sitting-

room on tip-toe. "It is Trapes!" she exclaimed in a whisper. "I told you he would come. He will not give his name, and Mills will not let him in. Shall you venture to see him?"

"Yes, I must, though I don't half like it. But, Fan, we are three to one. Do you think he is sober?"

"He seems very quiet."

"Oh, go and bring him in," cried Kate impulsively.

"Mrs. Temple will see the gentleman," said Fanny demurely, advancing to the door. Mills uttered indistinct, yet unmistakable disapprobation, let down the chain, and Trapes entered.

He had endeavoured to impart an air of respectability to his attire. The dented hat had been restored to shape, though the mark of its misfortunes could not be obliterated. A dark overcoat in good preservation made him look a trifle less raffish, while both tie and collar were straight and in good order.

"Circumstances which I will explain to Mrs. Temple compel me to call at this unreasonable hour," said Trapes, in the best manner he

could recall from his better days, as he stepped in and took off his hat.

"This way, if you please," returned Fanny, opening the parlour door.

Trapes bowed and entered. Fanny hesitated to go or stay, but, at a sign from her friend, followed him.

"You wish to speak to me," said Mrs. Temple, who had risen, and was standing by the table.

"Excuse me," said Trapes, still in a state of elegance, "but my communications are for you alone ; may I request this young lady to leave us ?"

"I have no secrets from Miss Lee," returned Kate. "Even if she goes away now, I shall tell her what you tell me an hour hence."

"Still," replied Trapes, "considering what sages (ill-bred old buffers, I grant) say of confiding a secret to one woman, it is not very prudent to reveal it to a brace."

"You will tell me no secret without her," said Kate quietly and firmly, "for I will not speak to you alone, and if your secret is to do me any good, it must be very generally known."

“Ay, the part that concerns you! However, Mrs. Temple, I cannot blame you after my disgraceful conduct to-day,” continued Trapes, with ‘an air of penitence; “part of my errand here this evening was to crave your pardon. I am heartily ashamed. I can only say that I was under the influence of the demon drink, to which I have been driven by misfortunes not all deserved—the base ingratitude of—— but,” interrupting himself loftily, “I did not come here to complain about the inevitable! May I hope you will forgive me?”

Fanny crept close to Kate, in a state of fear, dashed with acute curiosity.

“I do forgive you,” said the latter gently. “But it is very sad to reduce yourself voluntarily to a condition in which all the instincts of a gentleman, which you seem to possess, are lost.”

“It is—it is, by George!” cried Trapes, heartily and naturally. “However, it’s never too late to mend,” he went on, taking the chair indicated to him; “perhaps I may recover myself yet. Anyhow, madam—Mrs. Temple, as you wish to be called—I shall not forget the kindly manner in which you in-

terceded for me with that strong-fisted ruffian who knocked me over—not but that I would have done just the same in his place! I was always disposed to befriend a lady. I am especially so disposed towards this particular lady”—a bow to Mrs. Temple; “but”—a long-drawn “but”—“it is my duty to see that my impulses square with my interests.” Here Trapes drew forth with a flourish a large pocket-handkerchief, bordered by a pattern of foxes’ heads, and used it audibly.

“You are very good,” returned Kate, looking steadily at him. “Now perhaps you will tell me the object of your visit?”

“Certainly, madam,” he returned, then paused, eyed Fanny with some irresolution, and returned his handkerchief to his pocket. “My object—ahem—is simple. It is, in the first place, to obtain the—the advance of ten shillings you were good enough to desire me to call for, when you found yourself minus your purse this afternoon.”

All Trapes’s natural and acquired impudence was restored by the sound of his own voice.

“I do not think I named any sum,” said Kate smiling, “and I think your conduct exonerates me from any promise.”

"Very logical," said Trapes. "Nevertheless, a lady like you is not going to sell a poor devil with such a pleasant smile as that?"

"I shall give you a trifle," she returned; "but before doing so, I should like to have some idea in what way you can serve me. I do not want you to tell all you know, but prove to me that you do know something."

"Deucedly well put, Mrs. Travers—Temple, I mean. Well, then, I can prove that your late husband's will—I mean the one administered by Sir Hugh Galbraith—is a forgery! I can produce the man who drew it out, two or three months after Mr. Travers's death, and I can produce the man who employed him to do it." Trapes pulled up short, with a triumphant wink.

"You can do all this!" exclaimed Kate, her eyes fixed upon him. "Then why have you not enabled me to assert my rights before?"

"'Pon my soul, I did not know till last spring how shamefully you had been cheated. Then I did not know where you were, and I always like to deal with the principal."

"But you knew Tom Reed!" cried Fanny indignantly; "*he* would have told you."

"No, he wouldn't," said Trapes quickly. "At any rate, I think I asked him ; but my head," — addressing Mrs. Temple — "is not quite so clear as it might be. Be that as it may, I have shown you my hand pretty frank. There's the outline of what I can do. What are you prepared to give for the details ?"

"I am too much taken by surprise to answer you," returned Kate, changing colour visibly, quivering all through, with a strange mixture of feelings—exultation and fear, pain and pleasure. "If you are quite sure of what you state, how is it that you do not reveal all from a simple sense of right ?"

"Because I am not a simpleton, my dear madam," said Trapes, with an indescribable wink. "I am poor—infernally poor. I have been driven and chivied, and sold right and left all my life, and I want a trifle to keep me going for the rest of my days. Now I have told you the sum total I know ; but, by all that's good, the rack shall not draw the particulars from me, unless I have some profit." Trapes closed his lips firmly as he ceased to speak.

Kate felt dreadfully puzzled. She must not seem too eager, she must not lose the in-

formation. She did a little mental calculation during the momentary silence which ensued. This man had evidently been hanging on Ford since the spring, when he had gone to Tom Reed to inquire about him. He had then either exhausted or quarrelled with Ford—probably both ; if so, Trapes's only chance of turning his secret to account was with herself. It would be too bad if Ford was ruined, and the baser of the two rewarded. Her strong inner conviction of Ford's guilt gave her a key to the position which her shrewd legal adviser did not possess.

“ Well, Mr. Trapes,” she said at length (it was the first time she had mentioned his name—he looked up sharply), “ I am still at a loss to answer. I do not know how far I might injure myself legally by entering into any bargain with you. I really can say or do nothing without Mr. Reed's advice. I expect him on Saturday ; come here and talk matters over with him. I am not indisposed to assist you, Mr. Trapes. I have heard Mr. Reed speak of you as a man of excellent abilities, but unfortunate.”

“ Oh —— his patronage !” interrupted Trapes impatiently ; “ he is rather a keen

hand to deal with. But as you like, Mrs. Travers—beg pardon, Mrs. Temple. If you don't think my information worth a trifle, why I may as well bottle it up. I am not sure I can see Reed on Saturday. I'm due at Bluffton on Saturday. I came here in the best of good feeling towards you, though that tall chap has warned the police against me. I had gone into the waiting-room at the station to rest a bit, and I saw him ; he was just opposite the window, talking to a constable and describing me, till he stepped into the train and started. I had to slink out pretty quick, or I would have had more questions to answer than was agreeable. Yet I stuck to my text, and came to give you what help I could. I cannot say you have shown much gratitude."

"I am far from ungrateful, Mr. Trapes," replied Kate very quietly and firmly. "But, you must see for yourself, that in such a case it would be absurd of me to make you any promise. I do not yet know how far your information may be available."

"I should only ask a conditional promise," he interrupted.

"I can only repeat, Mr. Trapes, that with-

out Mr. Reed I can do nothing. You may be quite sure that I am eager to assert my rights, and I am not the sort of woman to be ungrateful; but, as to meeting Mr. Reed, you must do what you think best. It might be," she added, after an instant's pause, in which a sudden flash of thought suggested a stroke she would probably not have played had she reflected, "it might be more to your interest to make your confession to Mr. Ford." Her eyes were on Trapes as she spoke, and though he kept his countenance with tolerable success, there was a momentary look of blank astonishment, instantly covered by an insolent laugh.

"And who the deuce is Ford, when he is at home?"

"I need not describe him. You know probably more of him than I do."

"Not I," he returned carelessly. "Well, then, I suppose what you say is not so unreasonable. If, on reflection, I think it advisable to meet Reed here on Saturday, I will do so."

"Meantime," said Mrs. Temple, willing to conciliate him, "whatever course you decide upon I shall be happy to lend, or let you have"

—amending her phrase with a smile—"the half sovereign we were talking about." And drawing one from her purse, she laid it within his reach.

"I must say that is acting like a trump," cried Trapes, clutching it eagerly. "You couldn't make it a whole sov., eh?"

"I cannot indeed, you see I am far from rich."

"Well, well, come to terms with me, and you may ride on velvet the rest of your life."

"We will see about it. Good evening, Mr. Trápes."

She bowed him out politely but decidedly, and he retired, Fanny holding a candle, and locking, bolting, and chaining the door carefully after him.

"What a fearful, dreadful, dishonest creature!" she cried when she was safe in again, sitting down on the side of a chair. "The whole place smells of bad tobacco! Why would you not promise anything, Kate? I am afraid he will not tell a word that will do you any good unless you give him some money. Do you really think he knows all he says?"

"I do ; but I must not have anything to do with him. I must leave him to Tom. Oh, Fanny, there is an awful time coming ! I wish I was through it. Imagine having to prosecute Mr. Ford for forgery—he was so respectable and kind and obliging—and then Hugh Galbraith ! I do not seem able to face it all."

"No, indeed. I am sure it is enough to turn your brain. But as to Hugh Galbraith," insinuatingly, "you said you would tell me all about him."

"And I will, Fan, I will ! but not now. I could not now—indeed I could not—I want to think. Give me my writing-book." After arranging her writing materials as if about to begin a letter, Kate suddenly laid down her pen. "No, I shall not tell Mr. Wall till I have seen Tom. Fanny, do take your work and sit opposite to me ; I cannot bear you to creep about putting things away in that distractingly quiet fashion. Ah, dear, dear Fan ! how cross and unreasonable I am—and to you who have been such a help and a comfort to me during my eclipse."

"Have I really ?—then I am worth something. Never mind, the eclipse is nearly

over, and won't you blaze out gloriously by-and-by!"

"Heaven knows! I fear the future more than I can say. I feel it is just a toss-up, apart from success or failure, whether my lot is to be happy or miserable; but it might be—oh, so happy!"

"I know," said Fanny significantly, and took up her needlework with her usual cheerful submission.

Mrs. Temple closed her writing-book, and drawing her chair to the fire, sat there in deep thought the rest of the evening, occasionally addressing a disjointed observation out of her meditations.

The night was nearly sleepless. At first the fatigue of the many emotions through which she had passed insured her an hour of forgetfulness, but she was disturbed by dreams. Again and again Hugh Galbraith stood before her with outstretched hand, asking her to place hers in it for ever, and she woke, her heart beating wildly, and sobbing out the words, "Yes, for ever, Hugh!"

Then her busy brain set to work revolving the events of the day, picturing their results

—the most terrible was the impending ruin of Ford.

As regarded Galbraith, she was not quite without hope. But Ford—how could she spare him? A daring project suggested itself: she thought long, and turned it on every side; then, slipping gently out of bed, she lit her candle, wrapped herself in her dressing-gown, and stole softly, noiselessly downstairs to the shop parlour. Here she took out paper and pen, traced a few lines, enclosed them in an envelope, directed and stamped it, placed the letter carefully in her pocket, and crept back as noiselessly as she had descended.

The changefulness of the English climate asserted itself next morning—all trace of St. Martin's summer had disappeared. A stiff south-easter was lashing the bay into foam and fury, and driving stinging showers of fine rain that seemed trying to get down, with only occasional success, against the windows and into nooks with bitter vehemence.

"And you have been out this wretched morning," said Fanny reproachfully, as Kate joined her at breakfast.

"I have, I could not help it, I wanted so



much to go ; and I think a brisk walk has done me good."

" More harm than good, I suspect," returned Fanny, disapprovingly : but she stopped there, for Kate's heavy eyes and anxious expression disarmed her.



CHAPTER IX.

WELCOME as he ever was, Tom Reed was perhaps never so anxiously looked for as on the present occasion. Kate felt that he could disentangle the ravelled skein of her affairs ; that he only could deal with Trapes ; and his tact so manipulate the difficulties with which her relations to Galbraith bristled, as to effect a fair division of the property she hoped to prove her own, without letting Galbraith know her identity till it was accomplished.

Kate enjoyed the rare advantage of being in sympathy with her adviser. Generally an adviser is an enemy, whose opinions, ranged under a different banner from one's own, are

to be in some way circumvented or twisted into accord with the advised ; or, possessing sufficient weight to impose them upon the hearer, they are so often acted upon in an unwilling spirit as to neutralise their possible good effect.

But there was a real accord between Tom Reed and the young widow ; even when they differed, each knew that he or she was thoroughly understood by the other.

Fanny was of course in a state of unconcealable joy. She had stolen half an hour in the afternoon to compound a lobster currie for the late dinner or early supper at which Tom was expected. A low and mundane method of preparing for a lover's reception, perhaps, in the reader's opinion, but—ask the lover's !

The trains between Stoneborough and Pierstoffe were by no means patterns of punctuality, and the friends agreed not to expect Tom till quite half an hour after he was due. That half an hour was nearly exhausted, when their attention was diverted by the entrance of Mills with a note, an untidy note without an envelope, and fastened

by a wafer. It was directed to T. Reed, Esq., in a very intoxicated-looking hand.

"This has just been brought by a boy from the *Shakespeare Inn*, ma'am, and he wants to know if Mr. Tom is come."

"Say he has not, but we expect him every moment," replied Mrs. Temple, scanning the note critically. "This is from Trapes, no doubt."

"Don't you think we might open it?" insinuated Fanny, laying a couple of covetous little fingers on it. "It is all about yourself, of course. I really think you might read it, Kate."

"You impatient puss! I think we might wait for Tom to read his own correspondence. He will be here in a quarter of an hour if he comes at all."

"Ah, Kate, that is a cruel 'if'!"

"Never fear, Fan—— There, there is some conveyance stopping at the door. Here he is, and I shall run away!"

"Indeed, Kate, indeed you need not!"

But Kate was gone. The next moment a hearty hug, a long, loving kiss, put everything and everyone save the donor out of Fanny's head.

"It seems a hundred years since I saw you, my darling," cried Tom, who, though looking a little thin and worn, was in high spirits and full of animation. "You little, ungrateful, saucy coquette! you are as blooming and bright as if I had been at your elbow all the time! Where is the pale cheek and tear-dimmed eyes that ought to show the sincerity with which you mourned my absence, and the severe mental arithmetic you exercised counting the days till I came?"

"Ah, Tom, I should have had a dash of uncertainty to reduce me to the proper condition of paleness and dimness. But I know you, and I am at rest;" a small responsive hug, and some half-uttered ejaculations interrupted, as may be imagined.

"I see I do not go the right way to work to show what a valuable article I am!" cried Tom.

"If you worried, or gave me any trouble, I should not care a straw about you," said Fanny, with a pretty mou.

"Now let me call Kate, she is dying to see you."

"I think she might give us a few minutes more law."

"Oh, here, Tom, is a note for you!" cried Fanny, darting to the mantelpiece and taking it down. "I believe it is from that strange man, Mr. Trapes."

"Trapez!" echoed Tom, in much surprise. "How does he know that I am here?"

"Oh, because—but I will leave Kate to tell everything. Just do look at the note!"

"There! you may discount your rights, if you choose," said Tom laughing, and handing the scrawled morsel of paper to her.

"What a hand! What is that word?"

"'Seriously.'"

"Read it to me, dear Tom?"

"'My dear Reed,—I am seriously ill, and cannot go to see you as I promised Mrs. T——. I feel as if I was near the end of the race, and nowhere! Look in on me like a brick to-morrow. Yours, "G. TRAPES.'

"If Trapez knocks up, he will not last long," said Tom gravely; "but call Mrs. Travers. I long to hear all about everything!"

"Now tell me how you unearthed Trapez," asked Tom.

They were sitting round the fire after

dinner, Mrs. Temple having insisted on his refreshing himself before going into any discussion of business.

"He came to the surface of his own accord," she replied, and proceeded to describe her encounter with him clearly and shortly, till she came to the part performed by Galbraith, where she broke down for an instant, paused, collected herself, and continued her narrative by a decided abridgment.

"When I was sufficiently recovered to walk home, Sir Hugh Galbraith was good enough to come part of the way, and I have not seen him since." She then passed rapidly on to Trapes's evening visit, and his remarkable boast: "I can produce the man who drew out the will, two or three months after Mr. Travers's death; and I can produce the man that employed him to do it!"

"This is very extraordinary," said Tom, when Kate ceased speaking. "If Trapes can make good his promise, of course your success is an accomplished fact. But I must warn you that my former acquaintance is given to the wildest romancing at times. Still, I believe he does know something of importance. One point, however, I must press upon you,

Mrs. Temple : do not see this scamp any more—leave him to me.”

“ Most willingly and thankfully, dear Tom.”

“ Very well. Now, do you think he recognised Galbraith ?”

“ No ; I do not think he did.”

“ Mind,” continued Tom, “ I don’t think it matters a straw whether he tells his tale to Galbraith or to you, if he can support it ; for, of course, a man of Galbraith’s position and character would not for a moment hesitate about restoring your rights. All I want to make sure of before we stir in the matter is, to be prepared with irresistible proof. As things are at present, we should only be knocking our heads against the stone wall of a long lawsuit were you to move. However, you must leave Trapes to me.” There was a pause, during which Tom appeared lost in thought—a condition which Kate and Fanny respected too much to disturb. At last he roused himself, and assumed the attitude peculiar to Britons when about to dictate or domineer—that is, he placed himself on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire. “ It was a remarkable, though fortunate accident that Sir Hugh Galbraith came to your assis-

tance. Is it permitted to ask what brought him to Pierstoffs just in the nick of time?" And Tom, with an air of comical solemnity, paused for a reply.

Kate crimsoned even over her little ears, but answered steadily, though in a low voice, "No, Tom, you must not ask. I cannot tell you any fibs, so I would rather say nothing."

"Ahem!—and in spite of this gallant rescue and unexpected appearance—I presume it was unexpected?"

"Most unexpected!" she returned.

"You are determined to carry the war into the enemy's country?"

"Quite determined!" said Kate, rising and coming to the fire, where she leant against the chimneypiece, "if I can bring an overwhelming force to bear upon his position."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Tom quickly, darting one of his keenest glances at the fair, downcast face before him, "that you have any fresh cause for vengeance?"

"For vengeance? oh, no!" she returned, looking frankly into his eyes. "My opinion of Sir Hugh is changed for the better. It is for his sake as well as my own that I wish matters hurried on."

"You are incomprehensible!" he returned, less amiably than usual.

"Then do not try to comprehend me," she said, gently laying her hand on his arm, "but act as if the chapter of accidents had never brought Hugh Galbraith to lodge under my roof—continue to be my best friend as you have been."

"You generally make slaves of your friends," replied Tom resignedly. "However, I have not opened my budget yet. I saw Wall this morning. He had just had S——'s opinion, and showed it to me. He considers that there are grounds for taking criminal proceedings against Poole."

"And will Mr. Wall arrest him, then?" asked Kate anxiously.

"No. He would in the first instance summon Poole to answer the charge of having wilfully perjured himself by swearing that he was present when Mr. Travers executed the second will. But, as nothing could be done till Monday, I advised his waiting my return before he took any step, thinking there might be something in your idea that Trapes could give us information that would implicate Ford."

"And he can, depend upon it, Tom!" said Kate thoughtfully. "I dropped a hint that perhaps his information might be more valuable to Mr. Ford than to me, and I saw his countenance change unmistakably."

"You should be exceedingly cautious what you let out to a man like Trapes," returned Tom. "There is no telling what mischief he might make of anything—or nothing."

"I do not think I did my cause any harm by my remark, but it certainly affected Mr. Trapes."

"Well, I shall probably find out to-morrow. I am not sorry the poor devil is obliged to keep his room. Men of his type are always easier to manage when they feel the grip of their proprietor upon them! Do you know, I have always been sorry for Trapes. He was a very pleasant, good-natured fellow once, seven or eight years ago—never quite free from a dash of the blackguard, but would perhaps have kept right if he had fallen into better hands."

"Perhaps," said Kate doubtingly. "Yet I imagine, if we could open such a man's head or heart, and look at the works as you do at your watch, we should find some weak or im-

perfect mechanism—some faulty bits in which the tempter can insert the point of his wedge.”

“Still, with different influences, he might have been a different man.”

Kate, gazing at the fire, made no reply.

“The long and short of it is,” said Fanny, with sly gravity, “he had not your adamantine firmness, Tom! At any rate,” with a pleasant, almost tender smile, “Kate and I are inclined to believe that the main-spring of your heart’s machinery works true and steadily.” To which Tom’s appropriate reply was a good, honest kiss, despite Kate’s presence.

She smiled, and naturally inquired, “What have you two dear friends decided upon?”

“You mean as regards a joint establishment?” asked Tom. “I cannot get a distinct reply from your undecided assistant. I wanted her long ago to give a month’s warning, and take another situation. I am glad to have a chance of pleading my cause before you, Mrs. Temple. As matters stand at present there is no reason why Fanny should not take me for better for worse, say,—come! I will be reasonable—this day fortnight! Mean-

time you might advertise the bazaar. You will easily dispose of it. Come, join us in London, be on the spot to enact the importunate widow, and make life a burden to old Wall! Come, now, like a brace of angels, say 'Done!' and we will arrange preliminaries before we sleep to-night."

"There is no particular reason why Fanny should not marry you," said Kate thoughtfully; "but I cannot leave Pierstoffe! This is not the most agreeable life to me; nevertheless, I will not break up the little home I have made till the question I am about to raise is settled; *then* I shall in any case make a change."

"There!—I told you so," said Fanny; "and as long as Kate keeps in this stupid, odious, disagreeable shop, I will stay with her. You don't think I am of much use, I suppose," a little querulously; for, though true to her friend, poor Fanny's heart had leaped with delight at the picture presented of going to live with Tom in London; "but I know Kate could not live without me, at least not comfortably—could you, Kate?"

"No, indeed!" heartily. "Tom, will you think me very selfish? Leave Fanny with

me just a little longer. I feel we shall soon know something more of this will,—and—I do not know why, but I am very sad and fearful.” She held out her hand, and her rich, soft voice faltered.

“My dear Mrs. Travers, you are our first consideration. It is a bargain. This case is postponed till this day month, when a decree will be given.”

“Thank you, dear Tom. And now Fanny will entertain you. I feel weary and head-achy, so will go to bed.”

The next morning, after breakfast, Tom Reed announced his intention of going to see Trapes at once.

“Yes, do, Tom,” said Mrs. Temple; “we can do nothing until we know what he has to reveal.”

“Well, I shall go to church,” remarked Fanny.

“And I will escort you there,” added Tom. “Will you come?” addressing Kate.

“No, it would be a mockery. I could not attend to what was going on. I am too much on the stretch to know about Trapes. I shall pray at home.”

Tom and his *fiancée* set out accordingly, and Kate bore the lonely waiting as best she could. Seated near the fire—her eyes fixed on the red coals, her thoughts roaming far and near—trying to picture to herself the effect of her claim upon Hugh Galbraith's temper and character, to recall the various indications of his nature which she had noticed, and from them to decide how he would take the final revelation. "I have done nothing wrong—nothing he has any real right to be angry with; yet will he not think that I ought to have told him the truth when I first refused him? But then, I never thought we should meet again. I never dreamed that I could care about him. I have such an extraordinary longing to vindicate my real self—the self he so doubts and despises—before he knows the truth; and if I do, how will he act? At present, he has some romance about me in his head, practical and unimaginative as he is; how will it be when he knows who I really am? Will he shrink from the plebeian adventuress? He is very prejudiced; but he can love! Half-past twelve. Tom is having a long talk with that

dreadful man. I earnestly hope I shall not have to prosecute any one."

In a few minutes more, Fanny came back.

"Oh, how glad I am to see you! I am dreadfully in the blues."

"Then it would have been much better for you to have been at church with me. The dean of some place preached such a splendid sermon. Made me feel as if I should like to clap some parts. The church was so crowded; lots of the county people were there. I saw Lady Styles and some ladies in the rector's pew. They put a strange gentleman into ours—a very elegant personage, I assure you. He was most attentive to me, and was good enough to offer me part of my own hymn-book! I don't think he imagined I looked sufficiently dignified to be even part proprietor of a pew. I found him there, and I left him there, for I came out quickly, hoping to find Tom."

"He has not yet returned," said Kate languidly; "and as to your elegant neighbour, you had better see if your purse is safe! High-class pickpockets generally attend the preaching of eloquent divines—at least, in London."

"How disenchanting," cried Fanny, feeling rapidly in her pocket. "I thought he was an earl at least ; not even disguised."

It was considerably past their usual dinner hour when Tom reappeared.

"I think you are right," said he to Kate. "He knows something of importance ; but he is in a curious mood. Though well disposed to you, his ramshackle conscience seems to suggest some scruple about disclosing what he knows. He is in a state of great debility, and penniless ; though I can see by the condition of his wardrobe that it is not long since he was flush of cash. He had been drinking very hard ; and now he has an extraordinary craving to go back to town with me. I shall indulge him, and settle him under Mrs. Small's care for a few weeks, at any rate ; he will then be safe, otherwise we shall lose him."

"But, Tom, this will cost you a quantity of money?"

"Not so very much ; and when you have floored Sir Hugh, you shall repay me."

"Then, shall you take this man with you to town to-morrow?"

"Yes, by the eight o'clock train. Nothing later will suit me."

"And you have gathered nothing of what Trapes really knows?"

"Nothing ; or next to nothing. However, be sure of this, that I shall never relax my hold of him till I *do* know."

"Thank you, dear Tom. And you believe it is not all talk, his boasted knowledge?"

"I do. The fellow *has* the secret, whatever it is."



CHAPTER X.

THIS same Sunday evening settled down with the orthodox Sabbath gloom at Weston. Sir Marmaduke Styles's preserves were known to be well stocked, and his lively partner had a certain undercurrent of good nature in her gossip that gave her popularity in the minds of her kinsfolk and acquaintance. The autumn parties at Weston were therefore not to be despised ; and when Galbraith so suddenly deserted his friend Upton, the latter, having lost the incentive Hugh's company would have lent to an excursion in the wild West of Ireland, applied for extension of leave, and

availed himself of Lady Styles's renewed invitation.

The household] being conducted on the country type, dinner was celebrated on Sundays at half-past six instead of half-past seven—why, it would be difficult to explain, as the alteration gave no help to the well-disposed servants who wished to attend evening service; but as it inconvenienced all parties, the arrangement probably fulfilled its end—at any rate, in keeping up the custom, Lady Styles experienced the conscious approving glow that ought to wait on self-sacrificing Christianity.

The ladies had assembled in the drawing-room after dinner. It was a small party; three or four, besides the hostess, lounged comfortably round a glowing fire of wood and coal.

“I have heard the Dean preach better than to-day,” Lady Styles was saying; “he had not his usual fire and go.”

“A country congregation is perhaps refrigerating,” remarked the Honourable Mrs. A——.

“Ha! ha! ha! I assure you Pierstoffe

considers itself peculiarly intelligent or intellectual."

"There is a great difference between the terms, dear Lady Styles," said Miss Brandon, a handsome woman in the earliest period of the "turn of the leaf," who knew and could do nearly everything, save how to make a fortune, or pick one up, and who had a sort of relative's right to be at Weston in the autumn.

"A distinction without a difference, I suspect, Cecilia; at any rate, there was a very full attendance. I saw all the principal tradespeople there, except my *rara avis* of the Berlin Bazaar; but her friend and partner represented the house. By-the-way, if I am not much mistaken, they put Colonel Upton into her pew. I wish he could see the young widow. I should like to know his opinion of her."

"You must know," said Miss Brandon, in reply to an interrogative elevation of Mrs. A——'s eyebrows, "Lady Styles has a sort of *rêve de quinze ans* about two women who keep a fancy bazaar here. They certainly appear very distinguished compared with the Pierstoffs standard, but I think their elegance

would pale beside Madame Elise's or Howell and James's young ladies. Their principal charm consists of a mystery which the joint efforts of Lady Styles and Doctor Slade have failed to elucidate."

"Doctor Slade!" cried her ladyship; "pray do not imagine I am a gossip like him. His gossip is of the commonest type—mere surface sweepings to amuse his lying-in women with." When speaking warmly Lady Styles was not always limited by sensitive delicacy in her phraseology. "He always imagines the most commonplace solution even to the most piquant mysteries. He has no grasp of mind, no real experience of the world."

"Doctor Slade is the man in a shirt frill, who is dining here to-day?" put in Mrs. A——.

"Yes; and what an enormous time they are sitting," continued the hostess. "Barnes," to the butler, who appeared with tea, "have you taken coffee to the gentlemen?"

"Yes, my lady."

"It is always the case; that man always keeps Sir Marmaduke. He has a lot of old stories which Sir Marmaduke is accustomed to laugh at, and likes to hear over and over

again. But for all that he is clever as a medical man. I believe his treatment of Sir Hugh Galbraith was masterly—he had concussion of the brain, compound fracture of the arm, various contusions, and I do not know what besides, and in two months he was nearly well. By-the-bye, he—Galbraith I mean—lodged at my charming widow's, and I believe he never saw her but twice all the time he was there, she is such a prudent, dignified creature. Ah, here they are at last. Colonel Upton, did they not put you in the Berlin-wool pew at church to-day?"

"I cannot say," he returned, coming over and sitting down at the opposite side of the ottoman on which Lady Styles, in the splendour of her dinner-dress, was spread out. "I saw no Berlin wool there, only a very pretty, piquant little girl. Who is she? The Rector's daughter?"

"Nothing of the kind. Do you not remember, when you were last here, coming with me to the Berlin Bazaar and buying a purse, and how disappointed you were because you could not see your friend Galbraith's landlady?"

"Yes, very well."

"Then the pretty girl is the assistant at the bazaar. I wonder why Mrs. Temple was not there. Perhaps she has gone away again."

"Has she been away lately?" asked Upton carelessly, as he helped himself to sugar.

"She was in London about a fortnight ago."

"I am really sorry to miss seeing this object of your speculations," said Upton meditatively, while he stirred his tea. "I suppose she often runs up to town?"

"No, scarcely ever. At the change of seasons—and——"

"This last expedition of hers," struck in Doctor Slade, "was rather disastrous—she had her pocket picked, and lost five pounds."

"You don't say so, Doctor; are you sure? She has never mentioned the matter to me."

"Oh, I am quite correct, I assure you. I met little Miss Fanny, with a face of woe, going to the post-office for an order to replace it."

"Really I am quite sorry for her," said Lady Styles.

"A serious loss for a Berlin bazaar," remarked Upton. "Pray, when did it occur?"

"About three weeks ago. Why? Did you hear anything of it?"

"No——nothing," slowly and thoughtfully.

"I do protest, Willie," cried Lady Styles, with much animation, "I believe you know more than you say. Perhaps you were the pickpocket yourself—just to get an introduction? Do make a clean breast of it!"

Upton laughed. "I have not your acute curiosity about this fair shopwoman," he said, and he relapsed into silence, though an amused smile lingered on his lip and in his eyes.

"Come, Doctor," said Sir Marmaduke, who was setting forth the chessboard, "you must give me my revenge to-night."

The Honourable Mrs. A—— and Miss Brandon, followed by two or three young men who completed the party, sauntered to the music-room, whence the sound of sacred songs soon issued.

"Pray, Lady Styles," said Upton, interrupting a rambling, highly-coloured version of the quarrel between Galbraith's sister and her husband—"pray what became of your nephew, John? I remember thinking him

such a fine fellow when I used to meet him here ages ago."

"My nephew John!" repeated Lady Styles, in a tone of high-pitched surprise. "What put him into your head? He has disappeared I do not know how long. He was a nice creature once. All you scamps are. But he went to the bad completely; cost his mother a heap of money, and died abroad—D. T., I believe."

"Did he not marry?"

"Well, I am not sure. I think it was doubtful."

"I heard he did."

"There were all kinds of reports; but I am sure I have not heard his name, nor any mention of him, for twenty years."

A pause, which was broken by Upton.

"If you will give me a mount, I think I will ride over to Pierstoffe, and reconnoitre the Berliners."

"My dear boy, let me drive you over."

"No, my gracious cousin, I prefer doing the part of a single spy. You shall then have the benefit of my pure, unsophisticated impressions."

“Very well, you shall have my groom’s horse; it is the best in the stable.”

But the next day was wet—not pertinaciously wet—what our northern relatives call “an even down-pour,” though sufficiently moist to check Colonel Upton’s fancy for a solitary ride.

It was the Wednesday after Tom’s visit; he had sent a hasty line announcing his safe arrival with his precious charge, and Mrs. Temple had resigned herself to an interval of patient waiting. The shop was empty, and Fanny had retired into the shop parlour, in order to trim a new straw bonnet in the latest fashion. Fanny sang to herself in a subdued tone.

Her heart was very light. She was not without sympathy, sincere sympathy, with Kate’s depression; nevertheless, her prospects were so sunny that for the moment she doubted the possibility of serious sorrow. All would come right for Kate also, and that delinquent Galbraith, whom she could not help liking. She could give him plenary absolution too.

“Miss Fanny,” said Mills, coming in, with

the well-known curl on her mouth, which indicated distrust of and contempt for the world in general, "there's a gentleman—leastways he has spurs and a whip—wants to see you."

"To see me? Who is he, Mills?"

"I dunno', miss; a pickpocket, for all I know. You had better not——" But Mills's wise counsels were cut short by the appearance of the individual in question, whom Fanny, had she been left to her unassisted conclusions, would have considered a distinguished-looking man. Prompted by Mills's doubts, she fell into a state of fear and confusion. Was he an emissary of Ford sent to discover and annoy Kate? Was he a detective despatched by Galbraith's lawyer, with the uncanny prescience of his tribe, to find out what was going on? She stood up, bonnet in hand, looking prettily bewildered.

"I beg your pardon," said Upton, for he was the intruder. "I understood you were at home, and that I might enter."

Fanny, still holding her bonnet, which was filled with blond lace, ribbon, and flowers, made a little, nervous curtsy, while Mills officiously dusted the chiffonier. There was

an instant's pause, broken by Fanny's saying, in an accent of unmistakable surprise, "You wished to see me?"

"I do,"—a glance at Mills, who, finding no further excuse for remaining, departed with a portentous frown to Fanny.

"I took the liberty," resumed Upton when they were left alone, "to look into your prayer-book when you left your seat last Sunday. A great liberty, I acknowledge; yet you must allow the temptation to ascertain my charming neighbour's name was a powerful motive," concluded Upton, with an insinuating smile.

"Well," exclaimed Fanny.

"You left your prayer-book behind you," drawing it from his pocket. "I confess, then, to having opened it, and read this inscription." He pointed to the flyleaf as he spoke, whereon was written, "John Aylmer to his wife Catherine, Gangepore, August, 1836."

Fanny's eyes dilated as she gazed upon it with doubt and dread. "I am going to be cross-examined," she thought, "and I shall make a mess of it."

"I see," said she, looking blankly up in her interrogator's face. "And what then?"

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to Miss Aylmer?" said Upton blandly.

"No, no, my name is not Aylmer!" cried Fanny, breathless.

"My reason for asking," continued Upton, is that a distant relative of mine of that name died in India, I imagine somewhere about that date," laying his finger upon it."

"His relative indeed!" was Fanny's mental commentary. "I am sure I know nothing about it," she said aloud. "The book is not mine. It was quite by accident I used it. I know nothing about it. I——" stopping in confusion.

"What is your name, may I ask?"

"Oh, Jenkinson," cried Fanny, with a desperate determination not to tell the imagined detective a word of truth.

"Perhaps the lady who—who keeps the shop could tell me something about these names," persisted Upton.

"No, indeed she could not," said Fanny, resolving at all risks to shield Kate from the terrors she was undergoing. "And you had better not see her. She is very clever, and would see through you in a moment."

"That is quite possible," exclaimed Upton,

a good deal surprised ; but while he spoke Fanny's blond lace fell to the ground, and the gallant Colonel hastening to restore it, contrived to entangle the delicate fabric in his spurs.

" Oh, dear," cried Fanny, crouching down to rescue her treasure. Upton stood tolerably still, but as Fanny bent round he could not help half turning to watch the pretty, troubled face. " Pray stand steady," she exclaimed, " or you will tear it. I thought it was your work to get things out of tangles, instead of into them."

" My work!" echoed Upton, greatly puzzled. " What do you take me for then?"

" Oh, I think I know very well! You fancy I am a simple country-girl, but I can guess what you are—at least, I think I can!" with dignity and triumph.

" I suppose a long course of regimental drill leaves its stamp on a fellow?" said Upton, good-humouredly.

" Regimental, indeed!" cried Fanny, with indignation. " That will not do."

" I see I have offended in some way," returned Upton insinuatingly. " And I assure you I have but two motives in my visit: first,

a strong wish—irresistible, I confess—to make your acquaintance; secondly, a sincere desire to know the history of this prayer-book.”

“He has the impudence to pretend he is smitten with me,” thought Fanny wrathfully. “I consider it altogether unwarrantable,” she said aloud, “your coming here to try and find out things from me! I daresay you thought you had an easy case, but——” Fanny had warmed up, and was now reckless of consequences.

“Will you be so very good as to say for whom you take me?” asked Upton, with grave politeness.

“A detective of some kind sent by——”

A burst of good-humoured laughter from Upton arrested any imprudence into which Fanny might have hurried.

“I am infinitely flattered,” he said, drawing out his card-case. “Allow me to introduce myself.”

“Colonel Upton,” cried Fanny, glancing at the morsel of paste-board he held forth, while a quick blush spread over cheek and brow. “I am so surprised! Are you Sir Hugh Galbraith’s friend we used to write to for him?”

"The same. And I must say such a premium on breaking an arm as your secretaryship, is a temptation to fracture one's bones I never foresaw."

"I am afraid I spoke very rudely," said Fanny, with evident contrition; "but I felt so sure you were a detective—though now I see you are quite different."

"At any rate, you have taught me a lesson of humility I shall not soon forget," returned Upton pleasantly. "Perhaps you will have no objection to give me some information about the prayer-book, now you know who I am?"

"Indeed, I must not—I mean I cannot!" And Fanny stopped, fearful of having committed herself.

"Of course I have no right to press you," returned Upton, noting the change of phrase.

"But wait," cried Fanny, anxious to atone for her scant courtesy; "I will call Kate—Mrs. Temple—and you can ask her. Pray sit down."

So saying, she rushed into the shop. "Do come, Kate. There is Colonel Upton asking all sorts of questions about your old prayer-book. And I have been so rude! I thought

he was a detective. Was it not *dreadful*? Pray go to him, and I will stay here."

To Kate's hasty, astonished queries Fanny could only reply, "It is Colonel Upton—do go and speak to him."

Thus urged, Kate went into the parlour and stood face to face with the supposed detective.

There was a nameless something, a gentle, composed dignity in her bearing that Upton at once recognised, and his own manner changed insensibly. He rose and stood silent, while he gazed keenly at the fair, quiet face opposite him.

"I have to thank you for restoring my prayer-book," said Kate, taking the initiative.

"It is yours, then? May I ask if this 'John Aylmer,' whose name is written here, is any relation or connection of yours? Do you know anything of him, in short?"

Mrs. Temple did not reply instantly. She paused, gazing earnestly at her interrogator. "May I ask why you inquire?" she said at length.

"Because I had a relative of that name in India at this date; indeed, to the best of my

belief, he was in this very place"—pointing to the inscription. "He is dead, and I have heard nothing of him for years. Yet I should like to know if you can give me any traces of him or his family."

"And you are related to a John Aylmer?" said Mrs. Temple. "How? In what degree?"

"That I can hardly say," returned Upton, smiling, and looking in vain for an invitation to sit down, for he was greatly struck by Mrs. Temple's appearance and manner. "I never could thread my way through the maze of cousinly degrees. But the man I mean was a nephew of Lady Styles, and she is a second or third cousin of my father: so you see we are all cousins together. It has roused my memory and my curiosity to find his name in the prayer-book Miss Jenkins left behind."

"A nephew of Lady Styles," repeated Mrs. Temple in much surprise, not hearing the conclusion of his sentence.

"Then you know something of this defunct kinsman of mine?"

"Whatever I may know, Colonel Upton," she returned decidedly, though not uncivilly, "I do not feel at liberty to tell you now, at

any rate, so you must ask me no more questions."

"Certainly not, if you put it in that way," said Upton, bowing and handing her the prayer-book. "However, I fancy you put a slight emphasis on 'now.' Pray, will you allow me to call again, when perhaps you will be at liberty to tell me a little more?"

"No," said Mrs. Temple, a sweet, arch smile softening the rugged monosyllable. "I shall not be able to tell you for some time. But if you really care to hear, leave me your address, and I will write to you."

"Yes, I care very much, and will be greatly obliged by your taking that trouble. Perhaps you would be so good as to write my direction!"

Kate opened her blotting-book unsuspectingly, and traced the words as he spoke them—"Colonel W. Upton, —th Hussars, Cahir, Ireland"—under his eyes.

"Not the first time I have seen your writing," he said pleasantly. "I am almost sorry my friend Galbraith is able to manage his own correspondence—reading his letters has again become a difficulty, whereas——" He stopped abruptly, too genuinely good-natured not to

regret having in any way disturbed Kate's equanimity ; for, in spite of her strongest effort at self-control, a quick burning blush overspread her cheeks, and even the stately, rich white throat that rose over the Quaker-like frill which adorned the collar of her dress.

"I saw Galbraith in town the other day," went on Upton hastily, "and he seemed all right. You must have taken capital care of him, Mrs. Temple! I really think I shall hunt here this season again, if only for the chance, should I be spilt, of falling into your hands."

"We could do very little for Sir Hugh Galbraith," said Kate in a low voice, but recovering herself; "Nature and his own servant seemed to accomplish everything."

She stopped, and Upton felt he ought to go, but preferred to stay. "I was sorry to hear you had met with such a loss," he continued, for the sake of something to say. "Have you found any trace of your purse yet?"

Again Kate coloured ; this time with an acute feeling of annoyance. Galbraith must have spoken somewhat freely of her to this

chum of his ; and the care and delicacy with which he seemed to guard their intimacy, and which had always touched her, must have been in some degree a sham. "I have not," she returned coldly, adding, with a sort of haughty humility, "although, as you are no doubt aware, Sir Hugh Galbraith did his utmost to assist me!"

"Did he?" exclaimed Upton, with such unmistakable surprise that Kate instantly felt she had made a false move. "Ah, he is not a bad fellow, Galbraith," continued Upton, "though he seems rather a rough customer. Well, I am afraid I have trespassed too long on your time, Mrs. Temple. I must bid you good-morning ; and you will, when it suits yourself, give me the history of the prayer-book?"

"I will, Colonel Upton. Meantime will you grant me a favour?"

"It is granted," said the Colonel gallantly.

"Then, if you have not mentioned this matter of the prayer-book to Lady Styles, pray do not. She is one of my best friends here, but you can imagine the effect of such partially-admitted knowledge as mine upon her. I should not be able to call myself or

my shop or anything else my own till all was revealed."

"'Gad, she would hunt up the scent like a bloodhound," cried Upton, laughing. "No, no, Mrs. Temple, that would be too bitter a revenge even for having been taken for a detective. Your 'charming young friend owes me some reparation. Pray tell her so, with my best respects. So good-morning, Mrs. Temple, and *au revoir*—for I have a strong presentiment that we shall meet again!"

With a low bow, Upton retired, leaving Kate still standing in deep thought. No, Galbraith had not made her a topic of idle talk. She had betrayed herself; but Upton, however he heard of her loss, knew nothing whatever of Galbraith's communications with her in London.

"Fanny," she said, slowly returning to the shop, "did you ever tell Lady Styles that I had my pocket picked?"

"No, indeed, I did not!"

"Then who did you tell?"

"Not a creature: that is, yes!—now I remember it. The morning I was going for the post-office order for you, before you had told

me not to tell any one, I met old Dr. Slade, and I told him !”

“Ah !” said Mrs. Temple.

“Was it very shocking ?” asked Fanny, in deep contrition.

“No, never mind. Do you know, Fan, I quite like that Colonel Upton. I believe he is a gentleman.”

“To be sure he is ; and to think of my taking him for a detective ! I am sure I shall never look him in the face again.”

“You will not be obliged, I imagine,” said her friend.

Meantime Upton strolled slowly towards the hotel where he had put up his horse, meditating more profoundly than was usual with him. “I believe I have a clue to the maze,” he thought. “By George, I fancy Galbraith has caught it hot and strong !—that Mrs. Temple is just the kind of woman to inspire a great passion, and Hugh, in spite of his cold airs, the very man to feel one. What with his pride and hers—for she will stand no nonsense, I suspect—there will be the devil to pay. I am certain he forsook me that day at H—— to go after her. Ay, it was the next morning

he was going down to a police station ; it is as plain as that pretty little Miss Jenkins' *nez retroussé* ! Galbraith has had a squeeze : he had better go abroad ; change of air and scene is the best remedy ; but to apply that nostrum in such a case, the plan would be to take a new love. I have a great mind to offer a remedy to the fair widow in the shape of myself ! I should not dislike making love to her at all. There is a world of undeveloped feeling in her eyes. What a 'cheerful visitor' I might make myself to Lady Styles if I were to sit down and treat her to a dish of my surmises and discoveries ! But how did that Mrs. Temple come to possess poor Jack Aylmer's prayer-book ? I should like to ask Lady Styles more about him and his possible marriage—but no, I have promised silence, and will keep my word in the spirit as well as the letter."



CHAPTER XI.

IF Kate and Fanny, especially the former, waited with almost sickening anxiety for news of Tom's proceedings, they had at least the comfort of full faith in him. No doubts of his ardent friendship or his earnest action complicated their pangs of endurance, even when Wednesday and Thursday brought no tidings.

In the meantime, Tom, who was overwhelmed with work on his own account, contrived to see Trapes every day, but without extracting any tangible information from him. He (Trapes) though recovering, was feeble, and always spoke as if it was his intention to "make a clean breast

of it as soon as he had settled a little business he had on hand," or "as soon as he was able to go into the City to see a fellow he wanted to speak to."

"Come, now," cried Tom at last, "do you want to see Ford? for if it is that, I will call and tell him. I shall be passing his place this afternoon, and I suspect it will be some days before you are equal to a journey due-east."

To this, after some demurs, Trapes assented.

"Don't you let on that I have seen Mrs. Travers," he urged.

"Of course not. Ford is not to know that she is in England."

"Ay, to be sure. Perhaps after all, Reed, I had better wait and write him a line."

"No, no, have him out here, and say your say! Then make a clean breast of it, and you will be ever so much better."

Tom was growing very anxious for Trapes's revelations. He feared a relapse of low fever, or a sudden failure of intellect. He was evidently linked in some strange way with Ford; how, it was impossible to conjecture. Tom therefore made it a point to call at Ford's office, and, on mounting the stairs, was struck

by the evident increase of the ex-clerk's business: various anxious-looking men—some with pocket-books, some with papers in their hands—were coming up and down; the office-door was open, and several persons were speaking to the clerks or writing on slips of paper.

In the middle of the office stood a very respectable-looking, gentlemanlike man older than Ford himself, evidently the manager. He seemed deeply engaged with an irate personage, whom he was endeavouring to soothe, and who held out an open letter. "I see, sir, that letter is very conclusive," he was saying, "but you need be under no apprehension."

"The delay is most annoying!" returned the other—a young man got up in "country-gentleman" style. "You see he promises to procure me eight hundred pounds' worth of Turkish Fives and Russians, at once. Now, there was a fall of an eighth on Friday in one, and a sixteenth on Monday in the other, and he missed both opportunities!"

"I really am not in a position to assert anything," returned the manager. "I know Mr. Ford transacted business on the Stock Exchange on Friday and on Monday, but

being suddenly called away, he had not time to leave me full instructions. If you will call to-morrow, I shall, no doubt, be able to arrange matters to your satisfaction, and make the purchases you require. I shall have heard from Mr. Ford by that time."

"I hope so," said the other. "It is altogether very extraordinary;" and, with a running growl, he turned to leave, very nearly knocking against Tom Reed, who now advanced.

"Is Mr. Ford away, then?" he asked.

"Yes," said the manager, looking sharply at his interrogator. "Obliged to run over to Vichy for a few days' holiday; but I shall be happy to do anything for you in his absence."

"Thank you," said Tom. "I only wished to speak to him on a private matter."

"Private," repeated the manager, thoughtfully. "I think I remember your coming here with Mr. Ford one day last spring."

"I did do so."

"Then, perhaps, you would do me the favour to call to-morrow, either early or after five? You might—that is, I shall probably be able to tell you something of Mr. Ford's

movements." He paused, and then added, "I should feel obliged by your calling."

"I will, then, but it must be nearer six than five," returned Tom, feeling that the request was unusual. So saying, and placing his card in the chief clerk's hand, he left the office.

"I wonder 'wot's up!'" he pondered, as he rolled westward in the first cab he could find. "There is something wrong with Ford! I wonder if he is gone mad? There was a very suspicious glitter in his eye the last time we met."

So reflecting, he called to the driver to set him down in B—— Street, where he spent a few minutes in explaining matters to Mr. Wall.

"Very well, Mr. Reed—very well," said the lawyer, "but I really begin to have serious doubts that this man Trapes knows anything at all! However, as Mrs. Travers seems content to await your rather tardy operations, I have no right to find fault. But, if I find you have nothing more tangible to communicate by Saturday, I really must summon Poole! That is our line I am convinced."

"No doubt, Mr. Wall, you will be all right

in that direction ; meantime, I hope to bring you a lot of information by Saturday." And Tom hurried off with more of hope in his manner than in his heart. It was too provoking to feel the goal almost within his grasp, yet evading his touch !

The next day was excessively occupied ; and six o'clock had tolled from the great clock of St. Paul when Tom Reed ran hastily up the stairs to Ford's office—those on the ground and second floors were already closed—and when he reached the door he met the manager just issuing forth.

"I had given you up," he said quickly, and in a different tone from that in which he had spoken the day before. "Pray step in."

Reed followed him. An old clerk was in the act of turning off the gas : "One moment, if you please," said Reed's conductor ; "I want to speak to this gentleman. But you need not wait ; I will give the key to the house-keeper as I go down."

The old clerk bowed and withdrew, and Tom could not resist a chill, creepy sensation, as if on the verge of a discovery—whether of a crime or a tragedy !—while his companion

raked the fire together and threw on some more coals.

"May I ask if you have known Mr. Ford long?" he asked, sitting down at one of the high desks.

"Not very long, Mr.—" returned Tom.

"Rogers," said the other, gravely supplying the word. "My name is Rogers."

"Well, then, Mr. Rogers, I have not known Mr. Ford more than a couple of years."

"But you knew him when he was at Travers's? My reason for asking is, that I am exceedingly perplexed; and not knowing any friend of Mr. Ford's to apply to (for he led a singularly isolated life), I was in hopes you might afford me some information. The fact is, I fear he has committed suicide!"

"Suicide!" cried Tom aghast.

"I am not sure. I will tell you the whole story; it will soon be noised abroad. I had thought him looking very wild and haggard for a few days, and on last Saturday was rather pleased to hear him say he would go over to Vichy for a week, just to recruit. There was really nothing to prevent him—no business I could not do; so he said he would leave me a power-of-attorney to sign cheques

and letters, &c. On Monday morning, accordingly, he came in early, and transacted a good deal of business, gave me the power-of-attorney to act for him, and started off with a portmanteau-bag to catch the boat-express from London Bridge, saying as he went, 'You shall hear from me fully on two or three points towards the end of the week ;' and I thought no more of it. But on Tuesday evening I had occasion to go to the strong-box for some coupons, and to my great surprise I found all the Continental securities—Turkish and Egyptian bonds, and a few Americans—which I knew were safe there on Friday evening, had been removed—altogether between two and three thousand pounds' worth. I confess I felt great uneasiness, not knowing Mr. Ford's address ; but, remembering his last words, I hoped the morning's post would bring me his promised letter. It did not ; but in the afternoon, shortly before you called, I received from his housekeeper, a respectable, elderly woman, this long letter."

"This is very strange ! Has he bolted, then ?" cried Tom.

"Not in the ordinary sense. I do not feel

at liberty to show you the letter," continued Mr. Rogers; "but it is to the effect that I am to use the power-of-attorney to settle his affairs; that he has left ample funds to meet all claims upon him; that I am to act as his executor, for I shall never see him again in this life! I went up to his place last night, and found from the housekeeper that he had not taken any clothes with him, and that on Sunday night he had sat up late writing. On quitting the house he had said: 'If I do not return on Wednesday evening, send this letter'—which he gave into her hands—'in the course of the next day to Mr. Rogers,' which the housekeeper accordingly did."

"An extraordinary affair!" exclaimed Tom Reed, rising and coming over to the desk at which the other was sitting. "Do you think it was his intention to commit suicide?"

"I do."

"I do not," returned Reed quickly. "His object is to escape."

"Escape what?" asked the other rather indignantly. "A more honourable, straightforward man never existed! Do you know any reason why he should fly the country?"

"No, Mr. Rogers, I do not. I only judge

from what you tell me. A man who is about to terminate his existence does not want a capital of two or three thousand pounds in the world he is going to."

"Then you believe he removed all the foreign securities?"

"Yes; don't you?"

"I don't know what to think. I hoped you might have known something of poor Ford's real circumstances. He lived singularly alone. I have telegraphed to a brother of his in Lancashire, and have set the police on the track, so far as I know it."

"Tell me, Mr. Rogers, has a man called Trapes—a seedy, flashy, turfy-looking fellow, been in the habit of coming here occasionally?"

"Not of that name," he answered, "but decidedly of that description. He called himself Jones. However, I daresay he went by various names. Yes, a fellow like what you describe has been in here now and then. Sometimes he would be here two or three times running, and would then disappear for a considerable period. Why, do you connect him with Ford's disappearance?"

"I have a vague idea—mind, very vague—

that he has something to do with it. Should I ascertain more, I shall let you know."

After some further desultory talk and conjectures, Reed took his leave, very much astonished at the result of his inquiries, and resisting as illogical the tendency of his imagination to connect Ford's strange disappearance with Trapes, and Trapes's alleged knowledge of the will.

He was determined to lose no time in communicating his curious intelligence to Trapes, for he could not help feeling that it would affect his broken-down *protégé* strongly. But the editor of a morning paper is a slave to the thunder he wields, and it was past Trapes's late breakfast hour before Tom could make his way to him next day.

"He was very bad last night, sir," said the landlady as she opened the door smiling, as she ever did upon the favoured Tom. "He had such severe spasms as it took near a pint of the best brandy before he came right, and then he begged and prayed, and cursed and swore, because I took away the bottle, so that, if my son had not been at home, I don't know what I should have done. But he is as mild as new milk this morning, and I have

given him a cup of fine, strong tea, but, bless ye, he won't taste a bit!"

"Now, Mrs. Small," said Tom sternly, "Mr. Trapes must have no brandy without medical advice. Provide it at your peril. I will not pay for it, remember that!"

He opened the door of the little sitting-room, and found Trapes—a pipe in his mouth, and *Bell's Life* in his hand—leaning back in one chair, his feet elevated on another.

"Well, so you never looked in last night," he began in a querulous, growling voice.

"My good fellow, I have brought you news enough to atone for any shortcoming. Your friend Ford has disappeared—decamped—is not to be found, in short."

Trapes started up, dropped his paper and his pipe, which smashed on the fender. "Bolted! What then! How the deuce did he get scent of what was brewing?"

"I know nothing of the whys and wherefores," returned Tom. "I only know what his head clerk told me," and he proceeded to repeat what he had learned.

"And has he smashed for a large amount?"

"I don't believe he has smashed at all. I believe no one has any interest in hunting

him up, except his attached relatives—unless it's yourself, Trapes—for I strongly suspect you could read the riddle."

"I am not so sure of that. But it's an extraordinary move on the part of Ford. To be sure he threatened; but," checking himself, "that is nothing to the point."

He suddenly lapsed into silence, picking up the fragments of his pipe in an absent, mechanical manner. "And that fellow Rogers thinks he has made away with himself?"

Tom nodded, watching Trapes, who seemed from the changes of his countenance to be undergoing some mental struggle.

"Well, whether he is or not," cried Trapes at length, with an oath, turning his face to Tom, "it seems as if his game was up, and I will make a clean breast of it!"

Whereupon he launched into a long narrative, at the end of which, and some talk with his friend, Tom administered refreshment in the shape of cold beef and a judicious allowance of brandy-and-water. A cab was summoned, and Tom Reed carried off his prize in triumph to Mr. Wall.

It was not until the afternoon post on Sa-

turday that Kate reaped the reward of her faith and patience. The letters were unusually late, and seeing a packet of considerable dimensions, Mrs. Temple had the self-control to put it in her pocket till "closing time" set her free to plunge into its contents. Indeed, she felt she dared not commence its perusal until she was safe from the eyes of her customers. Then, with closed doors, and her faithful little friend by her side, she read the following particulars, which are here set forth free from Tom's introductory and explanatory remarks.

About the end of February succeeding Mr. Travers's death, Trapes, who had been suffering from a run of ill-luck, happened to pitch his tent—*i.e.* take lodgings—in a small street off Gray's Inn-lane, where a former acquaintance—a law writer in very low circumstances, named Nicholls — managed to drag on a wretched existence. The poor fellow, moreover, was in a rapid decline, and Trapes, with the queer, incongruous generosity which flecked his restless, ignoble nature here and there, was kind to the sufferer, and shared what trifling supplies he managed to pick up with him; in return, the consumptive scri-

vener was glad to divide any windfall that came to him. The partners were, however, reduced to 'great straits; when one day, as Trapes returned from an aimless, hopeless walk, the law-writer told him he had written to a former employer for help, and the employer had replied, promising a visit.

"Now he cannot come and not leave a blessing behind," said Nicholls. "He is coming this evening, and as he is uncommon particular, and a bit of a prig, I think you had better keep out of sight;" to which Trapes acceded. When the visitor had departed, Nicholls informed his friend that he had made him a present of a sovereign, and promised him a job of writing.

"Now I really am not equal to this," said the poor scrivener; "but I saw that his mind was set on it, and that I should get very little out of him if I did not agree. So I thought we might do it between us, for you can write a legal fist; but I did not mention you, for it strikes me there's some mystification in the matter."

In due time the "job" was put in hands. It was to copy out and engross a will, simple and short, with blanks left for all names, sums of money, and dates.

Some slight delay occurred in procuring paper, &c. However, the task was accomplished in the given time, but by Trapes, as Nicholls, in going to purchase the materials, caught cold, and was really incapable of holding a pen. The gentleman for whom the work was done seemed anxious for speed and secrecy. He came himself for the document, and was satisfied with the manner in which it had been executed. He seemed, Nicholls said, concerned to see him suffering so much. He paid liberally, and called twice again. On his second visit he found Nicholls on his death-bed, and Trapes saw him distinctly for the first time. Very few words passed between them. The employer expressed becoming sympathy with the employed, bestowed an alms, and departed a couple of hours before the sufferer breathed his last, leaving no clue by which Trapes (had he wished it) could identify him. Nicholls had always carefully abstained from mentioning his name.

But Trapes forgot all about him, and scrambled on through another jagged, ragged year, when accident threw him once more into Poole's society, from whom he heard much

gossip respecting his former acquaintance, Tom Reed ; of his intimacy with Mrs. Travers (of which Trapes was already aware, forming his own conclusions thereon) ; also of the general upset in "The House" by the finding of a new will, and the disappearance of Mrs. Travers. This talk of wills did not recall any associated ideas to his muddy brains ; he only chuckled with dull gratified spite to think that Tom Reed was not to have his fortunes crowned by marriage with a rich, beautiful widow, after all.

It was not till the previous spring that his curiosity and self-interest were roused by coming suddenly upon Tom Reed in evidently close and familiar conversation with the benevolent individual who had befriended Nicholls.

His visit to Reed followed. Directly he became aware that Ford, formerly manager at "Travers's," and the defunct scrivener's employer were one and the same, a light broke in upon him ; ease, indulgence, fortune, were in his grasp ! "That fellow Ford" had of course been employed by the baronet, and the thieving rascals should pay for their villany by enabling an honest, well-disposed party

(himself) to enjoy a little peace and comfort ! With a glow of conscious virtue he proceeded to expend a shilling of the sovereign requisitioned from Tom for permission to peruse the "last will and testament" of Richard Travers, Esq., late of St. Hilda's Place, E.C., &c., &c. A glance at the document confirmed all his suspicions. It was his own work, written nearly three months after the death of the supposed testator !

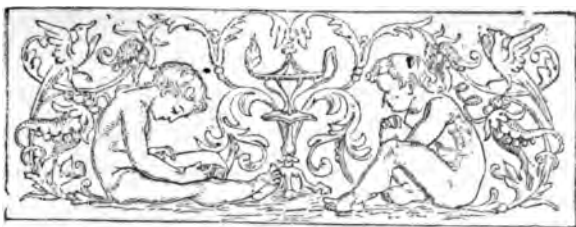
A visit to Ford, and an immediate improvement in the appearance of the fortunes—but, alas ! not in the habits—of the lucky Trapes ensued. It was evident, even on his own showing, that he had extracted quantities of money from Ford, besides making life a burden to him.

At last Ford rebelled, and declared that, rather than drag on such an existence, he would give up the game, make a clean breast of it, and defy Trapes.

This suggestion by no means suited that ingenuous individual. He therefore strove to collect all moneys due to him by hook or by crook, in order to give Ford time to cool and repent his rash intentions. With a view to turn what he would probably term "an honest

penny," he attended the Stoneborough races, and there victimised young Turner, who, not being able to pay up in full, in an unwary moment gave his address at Pierstoffs. Thither Trapes hunted him, and thus stumbled upon Fanny. He knew of her relationship to Tom, of her connection with Mrs. Travers, and once more he felt on the road to high fortunes!

Such were the principal facts contained in Tom's letter. It must be added that a tardy sense of compassion for Ford seemed to have induced Trapes to refrain from speaking out until he could give him some warning of the crash that was impending.



CHAPTER XII.

WITH white lips, and in a low, parched voice, Kate read these astonishing details to Fanny, who at the same time perused the letter over her shoulder. When it was ended, the friends looked at each other, and Kate, resting her elbows on the table, covered her face with her hands.

“The murder is out at last,” exclaimed Fanny; “and,” with a hearty kiss, “the queen shall have her own again.”

“Thank heaven!” cried Kate; “Mr. Ford is gone. I shall not have to prosecute him. How could he have permitted himself to act so basely, so treacherously, so fatally for himself! I am very glad he has escaped.”

"Well, so am I; but he deserved to be punished. I wonder what will be done next. I wonder if Sir Hugh will dispute your claim. But he cannot. I wonder——"

"You see," interrupted Kate, "Tom says, 'We are rather stunned at present. But Mr. Wall will write to you as soon as he has consulted counsel, and made up his mind.' We must just wait—wait still. All I hope is, that there will be no bitter, costly lawsuit. But how will Hugh Galbraith take it? I wonder where he is?"

"Then he did not leave his address when you parted?" said Fanny demurely. "You really must forgive him, and make friends, now you have beaten him."

"You must remember my victory is not an accomplished fact yet. But as to Hugh Galbraith, I have forgiven him long ago. Still, he has not ceased to trouble me, I fear."

"And, dear Kate, what shall you do? Shall you live in the grand Hereford Square house, or——"

"Dearest Fan, how far ahead of present probabilities you go. There are quantities of things to be done yet."

"If I were you I should advertise the Ber-

lin Bazaar for sale at once; that would be doing something."

"Yes. Whatever happens I shall not, of course, stay here when you are married. But, Fan," beginning to re-read the letter, "what an extraordinary history this is! With what skill and cunning Mr. Ford appears to have laid his plans! He must have thought that the secret of his iniquity was buried with the poor scrivener; and in his turn *he* thought that in concealing Ford's name he had kept full faith with his employer."

They talked far into the night, and then retired to dream, and conjecture even in sleep.

It was long, however, before tired nature's restorer visited Kate's eyes. Over and over again she pictured Galbraith receiving the news that fortune's brief smile was withdrawn, and replaced by her heaviest frown. The stern impartiality with which he would set himself to sift the evidence, and, seeing it incontrovertible, the silent endurance with which he would submit to his fate. And all the time no sympathising friend near to take his hand and say, "It is hard to bear."

Her heart throbbed, and the tears welled

over on her eyelashes with the intensity of the longing she had to be with him, to assure him that all should be well, if he would only be reasonable ; to tell him that she understood him and felt for him, and would be faithful to him. One more crisis was to come, and she knew it would be the greatest of her life. He must be told, sooner or later, who she really was ; and everything depended on how he took that information.

The succeeding fortnight went by with the strangest mixture of flight and dragging. Every day that was unmarked by a letter from Tom seemed an age of inaction, and yet at the end of the week it seemed but an hour since the first great news of the solving of mysteries had arrived. Still no tidings of how Hugh Galbraith had borne the bursting of the storm, or if he had even heard of it.

It was from Lady Styles the first rumour reached Mrs. Temple, more than a fortnight after Upton's visit.

Her ladyship, contrary to her usual custom, had driven into Pierstoffs before luncheon, in order to take some departing visitor to the train.

"Did not expect to see me at this hour,"

she said, waddling in with her usual vivacity. "Do you know, I think it is very foolish to come out as late as we all do in winter ; but it can't be helped. My coachman would give me notice if I took him out every day at eleven, and James would rebel. Yet in November it is almost dark before one can order the carriage round. And how are you, Mrs. Temple ? I cannot say you are looking very bright. Any news of your purse ?"

"None, I am sorry to say, Lady Styles."

"Sorry to hear it. I don't think I have seen you since Colonel Upton paid you a visit. By-the-way, it's a mistake your not keeping gentlemen's gloves. Lots of the men staying at Weston and other places would make quite a lounge here, and buy heaps——"

"That is exactly what I should not like the Berlin Bazaar to become, Lady Styles," returned its mistress. "It is a lady's shop *par excellence*."

"I am sure you are the most prudent young woman in the world ; still I am certain a mixed multitude pays. Do you know, I do not think I should make a bad woman of business myself."

"Far from it, Lady Styles."

"Well, I want two pairs of black gloves stitched with red. Have you any at two-and-ninepence? No? Really, Mrs. Temple, your prices are extravagant; a Bond Street standard for Pierstoffe won't do, I assure you. Well, have you any dark violet at three-and-sixpence?"

Mrs. Temple could accommodate her ladyship; and while she was undoing the parcels and turning a whole boxful over to select a thin, elastic kid, she chattered on.

"Well, is there no news stirring? Have you seen Slade lately? No! I am surprised at a bright, intelligent woman living shut up like a mummy in this old house, never hearing anything or seeing any one. By-the-way, that reminds me. I had a letter from Colonel Upton this morning: do you know, he was quite struck with you. I can't tell you all the pretty things he said; and envied Sir Hugh Galbraith having been your inmate, and declared, with his usual impudence, that had he been in Galbraith's place he would have seen a great deal more of you."

"I do not think he would," said Mrs. Temple demurely.

"So I told him. but in his letter this

morning he says he had just seen Galbraith, who has been called up to town in consequence of some move of the enemy—that is, Travers's widow. She is making a stir about the will. I suppose it will end in smoke; but it is curious that the day I took the trouble of going up to see Sir Hugh Galbraith, when he received me so coolly, I suggested to him that he had not heard the last of her yet. Of course he pooh-pooh'd my suggestion; but it was curious, wasn't it?"

"I think this pair will suit you, Lady Styles," said Mrs. Temple, anxious to draw her away from this agitating topic.

"Well, they look very nice! May I try them on?"

"It is against shop rules," returned Mrs. Temple, smiling. "But you may."

This little concession charmed her ladyship, who was further gratified by finding they fitted admirably, and, after a little more talk, she rose to depart.

"And how is your agreeable friend, the traveller?"

"Who?" asked Kate, considerably puzzled.

"Oh, you know who I mean! The young man I had tea with. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, yes, I remember. He is quite well, thank you."

"Do you know, I met a man in town last spring so wonderfully like him. I was quite startled for a moment! It was at Lady Lorimer's, one of Sir Hugh Galbraith's sisters. She is a blue and a politician, and has artists and editors, and a perfect *olla podrida* at her house. Just as I went into the refreshment room I saw a gentleman handing a cup of tea to a very pretty woman, and he was so like our young man that I nearly cried out 'Shrimps!'"

"Very extraordinary," returned Kate, laughing, "but he is Fanny's young man, not mine."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Lady Styles, with a twinkle of delight in her good-humoured black, beady eyes. "I always guessed he was after one or other of you. And so he is her young man," reseating herself. "Now tell me all about it."

Kate, bitterly repenting her unguarded admission, had hard work to ward off her ladyship's very leading questions, and after a desperate encounter of wits, had at last the satisfaction of seeing her tormentor depart.

In the meantime Mr. Wall and Tom were working hard in London. The revelations of Trapes rendered criminal proceedings against Poole unnecessary, although he was called upon to explain how his name came to be appended to a will executed when it was incontrovertibly proved that he was sixty or seventy miles away. He was greatly astonished at the circumstances revealed to him, but adhered steadily to his statement, that late in February or early in March, previous to Mr. Travers's death, he had been called in to the private office to witness, together with Gregory, what he understood to be Mr. Travers's will written out by the latter.

He acknowledged that, about a week or ten days after, he had had "sick leave," which he had employed in attending the Reepham Steeplechase in company with Trapes; but he felt quite sure the signature shown him was his own writing. After meditating on it for a moment or two, he suddenly struck his hand on the table and exclaimed, "I remember now!—between three or four months after Mr. Travers's death, I was very hard up, and one day Ford noticed I was looking uncommon bad. As he spoke in an unusually kind,

friendly way, I took heart, and asked him for a small loan. He said he could not oblige me then, but that if I would come over to his place and take a bit of dinner he would. So I went. We had a very good feed. Then he lent me two-ten, and talked to me like a father, till he brought the tears into my eyes. Then he said he was making a little settlement on a sister of his, and asked me to be good enough to witness his signature. Of course I agreed, and he went over to another table and wrote something, and then he brought a paper, all doubled up, and says he, 'Put your name there.' 'All right,' says I, 'only I did not really see you write yours.' 'Never mind,' said he, with a pleasant laugh, 'I am sure you heard it, for I never had such a scratchy pen.' I was ashamed to say any more, so I just wrote my name, though I did not exactly see where he had put his. I wonder if he really had any hand in this! But he was done out of money by it himself, wasn't he?"

Poole had been kept carefully in the dark as to the suspicions, or rather certainties concerning Ford, and this fresh instance of the morbid cunning displayed by the late manager

struck Mr. Wall and Tom, who were both present at the examination of the signatures by Poole, as confirmatory of the deep-laid and carefully worked-out scheme, by which he had endeavoured to draw Kate into his power, and singularly illustrative of the keen foresight on all sides save the one where strong passion and unchecked desire had blinded his judgment and blunted his moral sense.

His whole plot rested its chance of success on the strength of Kate's dislike to Sir Hugh Galbraith overcoming her sense of right. Had he been able to view these forces with sight undistorted by exaggerated vanity and enormous selfishness, he would not have embarked in so disastrous a crime. Once launched in it self-preservation compelled him to persevere.

"What an awful life that fellow must have led for more than two years!" exclaimed Tom to Mr. Wall, who was making a note of Poole's observations. "I imagine he has had his share of punishment."

"It is very much to be regretted he has escaped the hands of justice," returned Mr. Wall sternly, "and I trust he may be caught yet. I have seldom heard of a greater villain. Just look at the confusion he has created!

First, poor Mrs. Travers suffers, and then Sir Hugh Galbraith! Finally, Mr. Travers's intentions are frustrated, for there can be no question that at the end of February 18— he executed a will, which Will this absconding forger has destroyed, and altered the date of the one substituted to bring it close upon the disagreement between Mr. and Mrs. Travers, of which he made so much. So we are compelled to fall back upon the first Will which Mrs. Travers originally proved. I must say that, although I am heartily glad Mrs. Travers is righted, I cannot help feeling for Sir Hugh Galbraith. He has laid out a good deal of money, too, in the purchase of property, I am told. Mrs. Travers can force him to repay all that, you know."

"Mrs. Travers will do nothing harsh or unjust," cried Tom; "but I agree with you it is much to be regretted the second will is lost. It is impossible even to guess at the true intentions of the testator. What course do you propose to take now?"

This was fully discussed, and with the advice of counsel it was decided to lay a statement of the whole matter, with Trape's confession, duly embodied in an affidavit, and the circumstances detailed by Poole and

Captain Gregory, before Sir Hugh Galbraith's solicitor, who quickly summoned his client from the congenial retirement of the family den. Here Galbraith had lived not unhappily since his last interview and rejection by Mrs. Temple. Something he could not define in her voice—her look—her soft, hesitating manner, gave him hope. There might be some difficulties connected with her past which she could not at once remove, but nothing that he would shrink from associating with the name of wife. He had her word for that, and it was enough. In another month or six weeks he would visit Pierstoffe again, or write and ask leave to do so. All hesitation and doubt had long since been exorcised by "the sweetness and light" of as honest a love as ever warmed man's heart.

Near Kate life was a fresher, fairer thing than he ever thought it could be. To be understood—to be loved—to have the brighter, richer tints of his soul, which had so long been dulled by the mists and miasmas of every-day commonplace association with men who aspired not, nor knew, nor sought knowledge,—to feel them glowing forth once more, retouched by the penetrating nobility of a nature in many things weaker, but also in many loftier, than

his own, all this was a vision of paradise. What a terrible awakening awaited him when he reached London ! His dreams were even more substantial than the reality he had tasted.

At first he was very little moved ; but as one overwhelming proof after another was laid before him, he could no longer refuse acquiescence in his lawyer's conviction, that the Will which had constituted him his cousin's heir was a clever forgery.

Having admitted this, he demanded a day's reflection. It was spent in a brave, silent facing of his position on every side, and a careful, deliberate decision on his own future plans.

When Galbraith reappeared at Mr. Payne's office he looked considerably older and sterner, but it was with perfect composure and apparent *sang-froid* that he gave them directions to communicate to Mrs. Travers's solicitor his complete conviction of the justice of her claims, and the means by which he proposed to refund the money he had withdrawn from her estate.

While these events were occurring in

London, Kate, finding herself too much overwrought by the strain of constant anxiety and correspondence with Tom and Mr. Wall, to give due attention to her business,—Fanny, too, being quite distracted from her usual routine,—it suggested itself to her mind one morning, while lying wakefully watching for the dawn, that she would ask Mr. Turner for the “loan” of one of his young ladies to attend to the shop. It was more than she could bear at such a time to be hunting for subtle shades of Berlin wool, when her heart was beating with a variety of emotions, hopes, and fears, inextricably mixed together, so that every hope was largely streaked with fear, and every fear with hope.

Fanny, who was in a most restless, nervous mood, highly approving this project, Mrs. Temple started immediately after their early dinner to call on the proprietor of the chief shop, glad to be out in the air and doing anything.

She was most politely received by Turner, senior, who heard her proposition favourably and affably. In the dead season, he was not sorry to get rid of an extra shopwoman.

He rubbed his hands over each other, in the "Do - you - require - any - other - article, madam" style, and said blandly that he was always happy to oblige a neighbour; that there was Miss Newman or Miss Finch, both very clever, industrious young ladies, with a good idea of business, and she could arrange with either herself.

Mrs. Temple thanked him, and was about to request an interview with one or other, when, with a portentous hem! Mr. Turner proceeded to inquire if she had any idea of giving up business, or if it was only temporary pressure that made her seek extra assistance. Mrs. Temple answered candidly that circumstances would probably render business no longer necessary to her, and that the Berlin Bazaar would soon be in the market.

"Then, ma'am," said Turner solemnly, "as a neighbour that has always been on the best of terms, may I be so bold as to ask for the first refusal?"

"Certainly, Mr. Turner," she replied smiling; "you are at liberty to make me an offer whenever you like."

He, still solemnly, replied he would take a

few days to consider, and then proceeded to summon Miss Finch, with whom Kate soon agreed, arranging, to her great satisfaction, that the young lady was to sleep at her old quarters, but to come to breakfast at the Berlin Bazaar each morning.

"I think, Fan, I shall get rid of the business without the trouble and delay of advertising," said Kate, after narrating her interview with Mr. Turner ; "and this poor girl seems very good-humoured and inoffensive—you must go in and assist her sometimes."

"Of course I will, dear. But, oh ! I do feel in such an extraordinary state ! Every ring of the bell makes me expect Sir Hugh, or news that Ford's body has been found ! or that Sir Hugh has shot Tom, or Trapes has committed suicide ! It will be such a relief when everything is really settled, and we have left Pierstoffe."

"It will," said Mrs. Temple slowly, while she took off her bonnet ; "but, Fanny, I shall always have a regard for Pierstoffe. It was here I found I could 'learn and labour' to get my own living, and altogether I am not sure I shall quit Pierstoffe with dry eyes."

"Ah," said Fanny, with a supremely know-

ing look, "I can understand your having more tender reminiscences of Pierstoffe than I have, but I will say no more. Goodness gracious!" interrupting herself. "What a violent ring! Mills!—don't you hear, Mills?" and Fanny started up with her hand on her heart.

"Law, Miss Fanny, it's only the post; you need not be in such a taking. There! two for the mistress, and one for you."

"One is a circular," said Kate, taking hers. "But who is this from?"

"Just open it and see," cried Fanny, who had pounced upon her own letter, which bore Tom's well-known superscription. "There is nothing particular in it," she continued, glancing at its contents. "No further news from Messrs. Payne. Sir Hugh is in town—he supposes in consultation with them, and Mr. Wall will let you know anything fresh. Now, who is your correspondent?"

"Colonel Upton!" cried Kate, turning to the signature at the end of her letter.

"How extraordinary! What does he say?"

"'Dear Madam,'" read Kate, "'since I had the pleasure of seeing you, some circumstances connected with my relative, the late

John Aylmer, have come to my knowledge, which make me especially anxious for any information that you can give me respecting the prayer-book which so stirred my curiosity. I trust I am not indiscreet in troubling you. Should you be inclined to gratify me, I shall be entirely guided by your wishes in making your solution of the mystery public or not——’

“I wonder what he can have heard?” said Kate thoughtfully. “At any rate, Fan, there is no longer any need for concealment. I shall just tell him the fact that his relative, John Aylmer, was my father. I wonder if Lady Styles will still continue to patronise the Bazaar when the news penetrates to her ears? Perhaps she will be disgusted!”

“Not she,” cried Fanny. “She will be far too much delighted with such a nine days’ wonder. Tell me, Kate, did you know all along that she was your great-aunt?”

“No, Fanny; not until Colonel Upton’s visit.”

“And how could you hold your tongue about it!”

The next day but one brought a long letter
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from Mr. Wall, announcing that Sir Hugh Galbraith had resolved not to make any attempt to uphold the will which had been proved in so extraordinary a manner to be false. His solicitors, on his part, expressed extreme regret that he should, under an erroneous impression regarding his rights, have alienated so large a sum from Mrs. Travers's property. To refund this was quite out of Sir Hugh Galbraith's power. All he could propose was to raise a mortgage on his estate, and repay a portion of the money he had expended out of the Travers' property; and from time to time, by further payments, liquidate the whole amount that was due to Mrs. Travers.

Various other details of business were dealt with, the letter concluding thus: "No traces of the missing Ford have as yet been discovered, nor do I think will be. Being amply supplied with funds of the least traceable description he is probably in the New World by this. I shall be glad to know what your plans are. If I might make a suggestion, I should say that your presence in town would be desirable.

"Are you in want of cash? If so, pray

let me know how much you require, and I will forward a cheque by return.

“ I am yours, &c., &c.”

“ Ah !” said Kate with a sigh and a smile. “ Have the old times come back ; the quiet, stagnant old times, when I never had even the excitement of a want ? But no, the game is not played out yet !”

She immediately replied to the lawyer’s letter, entreating him to make Sir Hugh Galbraith understand that she particularly wished him to consider the ten thousand he had appropriated, his share of the property, for she felt convinced that had the will for which the forged one was substituted been discovered, a larger portion would have been his. She pressed Mr. Wall to lose no time in making this proposition, and to let her know the result. She declined his offer of funds with thanks, assuring him that her *shop* had answered extremely well. Finally, she promised to come up to town as soon as she could arrange matters at Pierstoffs.

Now that she was free, she felt an extraordinary reluctance to move—why, she scarcely acknowledged to herself. But the real magnet which attracted her to her humble home

was a vague but instinctive feeling that Galbraith would come to seek her there—that in the wilderness of London they might miss each other, and that now nothing was to be risked, for the happiness of both was balancing on a mere thread of possibility.

“Yet I must go soon—I cannot stay on ; and Fanny is visibly vibrating to the points of her toes in her eagerness to take flight !”



CHAPTER XIII.

THE day after Kate had despatched her reply to Mr. Wall's letter she was somewhat surprised by receiving an offer from the prosperous Turner for "the good-will, stock-in-trade, furniture, and fixtures" of the modest little establishment, she having only informed him of her intention to part with it a few days before. The sum he proposed was sufficient to reimburse her for any outlay she had made, and leave a small—a very small margin of profit.

It was enough, however, to satisfy the proprietress, who, sincerely glad to have the whole concern thus taken off her hands at

once, only waited till the next morning to write, accepting Mr. Turner's offer, lest a more immediate reply should seem too hasty.

"Really," exclaimed Fanny, "nothing could happen more fortunately. We shall only have to pack up our clothes, and leave everything as it stands. When shall you go?—because if you will make up your mind, I had better write to Tom to take lodgings for us. "Oh," with a little ecstatic jump, and clapping her hands together, "how delightful it will be in London once more!—to go to the theatres!—and have Tom coming in to late dinner."

"I imagine you will soon have the privilege of choosing Tom's dinners for him; and I only hope you may be wisely directed in the choice, for I am convinced a great deal depends on how you feed a man," said Kate, oracularly. "And now run away, like a dear. I must look at my inventories, for of course Mr. Turner's offer is subject to a proviso that the furniture is in fairly good order; and I want to write to Tom besides."

"I am sure you could write in your sleep; the pen is never out of your hand. You are looking quite ill, more as if you had lost a fortune than gained one! Was there any bad

news in Tom's letter this morning? I think you have seemed miserable since you read it."

"Yes, there was something in it that distressed me; but I cannot say anything more now, dear. I shall try and think what is best to be done; and do you go and help Miss Finch in the shop. It is a fine afternoon, and the people will be coming *out* and *into* the Berlin Bazaar, I hope."

When Fanny left her, Kate sat quite still in a low chair near the window, gazing out upon the sea without being aware of what she saw.

For greater quiet and seclusion she had settled herself and her writing materials in the upper sitting-room, which had been Galbraith's. The table had been placed nearer the window that she might have the light as long as a November day would allow, but the sofa was still where it had been the day she had first spoken to him. She could still in fancy see him extended on it; still see the look of profound astonishment in his eyes, which, in spite of their light colour, were so stern and sombre, when he turned at the sound of her voice. Was that day to prove

fortunate or unfortunate to them both? Hugh Galbraith was specially in her thoughts, because of the concluding paragraph of Tom's letter.

"Johnston, formerly our correspondent in India, has just come in; he says he met Galbraith yesterday, who informed him he had nearly arranged an exchange into the —th (a regiment which sailed for India last autumn), as his old corps, the —th Dragoons, was on its way back, and he did not wish to remain in England. I do not know how far this may interest you, but I think it right you should be told."

She had not said anything of this to Fanny; but the words had stamped themselves on her brain. Wherever she turned, the words, "Hugh Galbraith is going away out of my reach. I shall never see him again," seemed to blaze before her. How could she prevent it? How could she draw him to her? What right had she to address the man she had twice rejected, and yet she could not bring herself to resign? Perhaps all his trouble—the crushing reverse of his fortune—had driven her from his mind! to so many men, women are but the playthings of their

hours of ease ; and if she made any attempt to recall herself to him, might he not consider her importunate ? Still she felt she ought—she must—make some effort to communicate with him. She might write and ask if he still wished to know the story of her previous life ; or she might send a formal request for a personal interview, as Mrs. Travers. How she wished some one would tell him her story for her ?

“Thinking will do no good,” she said to herself, rising and moving towards the fire, which burned brightly, thanks to Fanny’s parting attentions, and she knelt before it to warm her chill hands. “I shall just write to Tom, and enclose a little note to Sir Hugh, asking if he is still curious to learn my history. Tom will find out where he is. Yes” (standing up and gazing in the glass), “I do look ill.”

A pale, sad, sweet face was reflected, only the lips richly red, with a slight shade as of fatigue beneath the large yearning eyes ; the slender pliant figure, in its winter garb of thick, dark woollen stuff, looked a trifle less round than when she first stood before Galbraith. “However,” she thought, “the an-

xiety and uncertainty cannot last. I will take courage and write."

She went quickly to the table, and set forth her writing materials, then, seating herself, traced quickly the words, "Dear Tom——" There she stopped, and the succeeding sentence was never written, for Mills came in, with an unusually benign expression on her face. In her hand she held a card; and as she gave it to her mistress, she said, "He wants to know if you will see him."

Kate turned faint and dizzy as she saw the card bore the name of "Sir Hugh Galbraith."

"Yes, yes, I will see him!"

She went instinctively to stand by the fireplace, as farthest from the light, and strove to be composed, or to seem composed, though she trembled all over.

It seemed at once a long stretch of time, and yet but a second, before the door opened to admit Galbraith. He advanced and took the hand she held out, both remaining face to face and silent for a moment. Then she saw how gaunt and haggard and worn he looked; what deep gloom was in his eyes; what hard lines about his mouth.

"I hope you are not displeased at my coming here, Mrs. Temple," he said ; and she fancied a touch of melancholy softened the harshness of his voice. "But you must forgive me ; I could not leave England without seeing you."

"Leave England !" she echoed, sitting down on the sofa because she felt unable to stand.

"Yes," returned Galbraith, walking slowly to the window, and then back again to the fire, where he leant against the mantelpiece opposite, looking intently at her, while she, in the great, the terrible strain of the moment, was unconscious how her own eyes were fully uplifted to his.

"Are you all right ?" he continued tenderly. "You look pale, disturbed, as if something had gone wrong."

"Oh, yes, I am well enough. But tell me, why—why are you leaving England ?"

"It is rather a long story," resumed Galbraith ; "but considering how we parted last, and the sort of promise you made me, I thought it due to you to explain how matters are ; besides " (a short quick sigh) "I wanted to look upon your face once more " (another

pause, which Kate felt quite unable to break, and he moved restlessly away to the window and back). "Since I saw you last," he resumed, speaking quicker than usual, "I am sorry to say I have come to grief. You remember my telling you how I inherited a fortune from a relation who cut out his widow?"

"I do," in a very low voice.

"Well, the widow has come to the front, and proved the will to be a forgery."

"Has she really proved it?"

"Yes, there cannot be a doubt in any sane mind on the subject. There is nothing for it but to give up the fortune I had a short spell of. So I am going back to my profession as my only outlook now. There would be nothing in that alone I couldn't stand very well; but you see I took ten thousand pounds of this woman's money and used it; and I could as soon pay the national debt! It is this that hangs like a cursed millstone round my neck; and I shall be poorer than ever with a lifelong effort to pay it off."

"Surely she will not exact it," murmured Kate.

"I only know I am determined to pay,"

he returned. "But I did not come here to drivel about my troubles and distress you. I only want to show you my imperative reason for going on foreign service—to explain to you, that having no longer home or fortune or position to offer you, I must not press for the explanation you once promised me." He leant against the mantelshelf, and covered his eyes with his hand for a moment. "What was once a bitter grief is something of a consolation now, for I should not like you to feel what I do ; but I shall battle through, I suppose, Mrs. Temple," seeing her press her handkerchief to her eyes. "A new life and hard work will help to wear out both myself and my trouble. You will give me your hand,"—taking it—"and bid me God speed, will you not?"

He sat down beside her as he spoke, trying to look into her face, which was half averted.

She did not reply. Her heart was beating to suffocation ; she was trembling in every limb.

"Speak to me," repeated Galbraith, making a movement to relinquish her hand ; but, to his infinite surprise, her soft white fingers

closed over his ; it was drawn close to her ; and, before he could find any word to express the mingling of pain and pleasure and wild emotion her movement excited, with a gesture full of grace and shy tenderness she laid her cheek upon it.

“God of heaven !” exclaimed Galbraith, pressing close to her, “is it possible that my dim instinct did not deceive me ?—that you care for me—love me ?”

“Before you ask me any question, Hugh,” said Kate, finding voice and courage, letting his hand go, and starting to her feet—“before you ask a single question, hear my story, then——”

“Ay, I will listen to what you like ; but first, one moment of Paradise before I go out into the dark,” cried Galbraith, rising also.

He caught her hands in his, drawing her to him gently, yet with a force she could not resist. He raised them to his neck, and, clasping his arms round her, laid his lips on hers as if he were athirst for life and had found its well-spring.

“Now tell me everything,” he said, his voice husky with passionate delight—“here

—in my arms. I will not—cannot let you go !”

“ You must—you will,” said Kate, half frightened at this outbreak. “ Listen, then. My name is not Temple ! I am Catherine Travers. I am your cousin’s widow. I am the woman you despised so much, and you—you are my dearest foe !” The last words sounded like a caress.

“ What !” said Galbraith in great astonishment, and holding her from him to gather her meaning in her face as well as from her words. “ You Travers’s widow ? How did you come here ? Why did you not tell me at once ? And—but I see it all. And Mr. Tom—your man of business—is that newspaper fellow, Reed ?”

“ He is. There, you must let me go, Sir Hugh. That is my story.” She drew herself away from him and stood near the table with downcast eyes, and an air half proud yet shy, one hand upon her heart, which throbbed almost visibly. “ Perhaps I ought to have told you at once, but we seemed to drift into a sort of acquaintance which made explanation so awkward. And then I never thought we should meet any more ; and I enjoyed

making you feel I was a gentlewoman. But when I found that you cared so much for me, I was afraid you would go back to your feelings of contempt again if you knew who I really was. And I was so anxious to prove that my poor husband loved and trusted me to the end, that I was resolved nothing should turn me from my purpose of proving that dreadful will a forgery. And now, you will *not* go away?—you will forgive my half-involuntary imposition? Ah, Hugh! it went to my heart to hurt you—to rob you! You will take back your own?”

“It is the most extraordinary story I have ever heard,” said Galbraith, still bewildered; “yet now that I know it, I seem to have been a blockhead not to know who you were. Forgive you! I do not see that I have much to forgive, though I have had some hours of torture lately. But tell me, do you love me—really, earnestly? Are you willing to give me your life?”

And Kate, with grave eyes, but a tender smile on her trembling lips, said, “I am, Hugh.”

The night had closed in, and still the lovers

sat in earnest talk by the firelight. Their explanations were full, outspoken, unchecked by a shadow of reserve. There are moments of rapture—diapasons of delight—which from their nature cannot last, but leave a blessing behind them : this was one.

“And I suppose, then, you agree with me, that there is now no necessity for your going on foreign service?” said Kate with an arch smile, when they had fully discussed all points.

“Well, no. I suppose we can manage a fair division of the property. Though I warn you, you might find a far more brilliant marriage than with a poor baronet—your debtor, too, by Jove!”

“But if I happen to fancy ‘a penniless lad wi’ a lang pedigree,’” said Kate, abandoning her hand to his caresses.

“How did that fellow Trapes manage to warn Ford?”

“Oh, he did not warn Ford.”

“Then who did?”

“I, myself. I do not know what you will think of it, Hugh, but the night that Trapes made a sort of half confession here, I was so convinced Mr. Ford was implicated in the plot, that I wrote him a little line, saying that

Trapes was in communication with me respecting the will, and that no decided step could be taken for a week, adding that my writing to him was a profound secret ; then I suppose he ran away."

"And so you let the villain off! Well, I think you might have asked Reed's advice. It is too bad he should escape."

"Still, I do not think having to punish him would have added to my happiness—our happiness. I am glad he is out of the way ; and, I imagine, so are you."

"You are a sage as well as a witch! By Heaven, I can scarcely yet believe you are my *bête noir*, Travers's widow—the embodiment of all I most detested. And this is the reason why you looked at me so murderously the first time I saw you in this blessed room?"

"Yes, I was very angry against you ; which you cannot wonder at. Consider that, not ten months before, I had heard you tell Colonel Upton Mr. Travers might have been satisfied to take me for a companion on cheaper terms. Do you remember?"

"How do you know this? Where did I say it?"

"In Hampton Court Palace Gardens. You

were talking to Colonel Upton under a large yew-tree. I was at the other side, and then and there devoted you to the powers that punish."

"Yes; but how in Heaven's name was I to imagine you the sort of woman you are—a *rara avis* in any station?"

"But remember, Hugh, I am no aristocrat. My father was, poor fellow, what is called an officer and a gentleman; my dear—my dearest mother, was the daughter of a shopkeeper."

"I don't care a rap, Kate, who you are, so long as——"

"I beg a thousand pardons," said Fanny, pushing the door open slowly and prudently, "but it is six o'clock. Miss Finch is gone, and if Sir Hugh and yourself have not quite cut each other's throats, why, tea is ready."

"Fanny! you dear little soul," cried Galbraith, starting up joyously, "I have such wonderful news to tell you that you must give me a kiss!"

"Wonderful news—no news to me, Sir Hugh. I know what it is; but there, I will give you a kiss of peace and congratulation.

You and Kate have been made more than friends ! I always knew you would."

A few lines from Tom to Fanny, received that evening, announced his intention of running down the next day to talk matters over and make certain arrangements which, in his opinion, had been delayed too long.

"Will you not stay and see our good friend and prime minister?" said Kate to Galbraith. "I want you to know and value him."

"I had no intention of returning to town till Monday," replied Galbraith. "A letter to the army agent will do as well as a visit, and I think the redoubted Tom will back me up as to the arrangements I want to make."

So it happened that the next day a very happy *parti carré* sat down to high tea in Mrs. Travers's (the name of Temple was now discarded) pretty drawing-room ; four happier hearts could not be found ; "quips and cranks and wreathed smiles" flew from lip to lip, mellowed by a real lovingkindness for each other. Galbraith confessed in his heart that, although a newspaper fellow, and a bit of a radical, Tom Reed was a gentleman and an

acquisition ; while Tom's delight at the solution of all difficulties, and the righting of all injustice, by the prospective union of Kate and her "foe," was sincere and heartfelt.

Kate had begun to dispense that crucial test of a tea-maker, the second cup, when a long, loud, irregular rapping at the front door caused her to pause in her operations.

"Who can it be?" cried Mrs. Travers.

"Oh, I do not care," said Fanny. "We are no longer two 'lone, lorn' females ! With Tom and Sir Hugh here, I am as bold as a lion."

They were silent for a moment, and then Mills opened the door. "If you please, mum, here's my Lady Styles wants to speak to you, right or wrong."

"Oh, have her in !" cried Galbraith. "The sooner everything is known the better ; and she is a first-rate circulating medium."

But her ladyship waited no permission. Galbraith's words were hardly uttered before she was upon them.

"My dear Mrs. Temple ! you really must excuse my coming in ; but I *must* see you about an extraordinary——" stopping short, as she crossed the threshold and recognised

the group before her. "The young traveller, I protest! and Sir Hugh Galbraith—I really am surprised. Perhaps I am in the way; but, my dear creature, I have such an extraordinary letter from Upton! I only found it when I came in from calling at the vicarage to-day; and late as it was, I ordered the carriage and came straight away to speak to you." To the general company: "Pray don't let me keep you standing. I daresay you know what I mean, my dear Mrs. Temple! would you rather come and speak to me in another room, or the shop?"

"No, Lady Styles," replied Kate with a smile and a blush; "we are all true friends here; we have no secrets."

"Very nice, indeed!" cried her ladyship, with a stare of undisguised astonishment at Galbraith. "Well, then, Upton tells me you are the daughter of my nephew, John Aylmer, and—and—that pretty girl he ran away with—and married—I believe."

"I am," said Kate quietly; "and I possess the marriage certificate of my parents."

"Well, I protest, it's the most extraordinary, romantic, unheard of affair I ever knew! My dear, I always thought your face was familiar

to me ; now I recognise the likeness to my poor brother, your grandfather! Berlin Bazaar, or no Berlin Bazaar, you are a nice creature, and you shall come and stay with me." And Lady Styles took Kate's hand and bestowed a kindly, audible kiss upon her cheek. "Now," she resumed, sitting down at the table, "come, do tell me all about everything! I can't make out what brings Sir Hugh Galbraith here. I am really sorry to hear such bad tidings of you," she went on, addressing him. "But I told you I thought that widow would be a thorn in your side yet ; now, didn't I?"

"You certainly did," said Galbraith, laughing a genial heart-laugh very unusual to him; "but instead of rushing into legal warfare, I have persuaded her to become bone of my bone."

"Excellent! very judicious! a common-sense line of action. But pray, Sir Hugh, is she aware of your visits here? I am not strait-laced, but——"

"She highly approves," interrupted Galbraith.

"Oh, Tom, Tom!" cried Mrs. Travers, laughing. "You are accustomed to manage

the *dénouements* of thrilling tales ; will you tell Lady Styles everything ?”

Whereupon Tom detailed a simple narrative of the principal events set forth in the foregoing pages ; during which Lady Styles was a study. She followed his words with her eyes and a motion of her lips, as though she were absolutely drinking the delicious revelations. Her fat, jewelled hands (for she soon drew off her gloves, in the excitement of the moment) twitched and clutched at her dress as they lay on what were unmistakably her ladyship’s knees ; and when he reached the climax of Mrs. Travers’s approaching marriage with Sir Hugh Galbraith, her joy, her exultation knew no bounds.

“ My dear creature, I never in all my experience knew anything half so wonderful, and delightful, and romantic, and satisfactory ; only I should like to have hung Ford ! And you, my dear Mr. Tom, are going to be married to this charming young lady ! I tell you what, you shall all come to me, and we will have what Willie Upton would call ‘ the double event ’ at Weston. Why, it will supply the country with talk for the next ten years to come ! I am sure, Sir Hugh, I already look

on you as my nephew ; and I shall always thank Heaven that I happened to be on the spot when you were carried in here insensible. Only for me, there is no knowing where that obstinate fellow Slade might have taken you, and then nothing would have come about," said her ladyship, throwing back her bonnet-strings, and stirring the cup of tea Fanny placed before her, joyously, while her broad, good-humoured face beamed upon them.

"But, my dear Lady Styles——"

"Dear aunt, if you please," interrupted her ladyship.

"My dear aunt, then," repeated Kate, "I was under the impression that Doctor Slade ordered Hugh to be brought here from the hunting-field, and——"

"Not at all, not at all, my dear ! You," turning to Tom, "must remember my standing up from that nice tea and shrimps, and my words to Slade were, 'Don't exhaust him by going further, bring him in here and keep him quiet.'"

"I cannot recall the words," said Tom demurely.

"Never mind, I can," said her ladyship, with an air of deep conviction. "And but

for me, my niece here, Mrs. Travers, would never have had an opportunity——”

She paused, and Tom finished the sentence—

“Of heaping coals of fire on the head of ‘Her dearest Foe.’”

THE END.

